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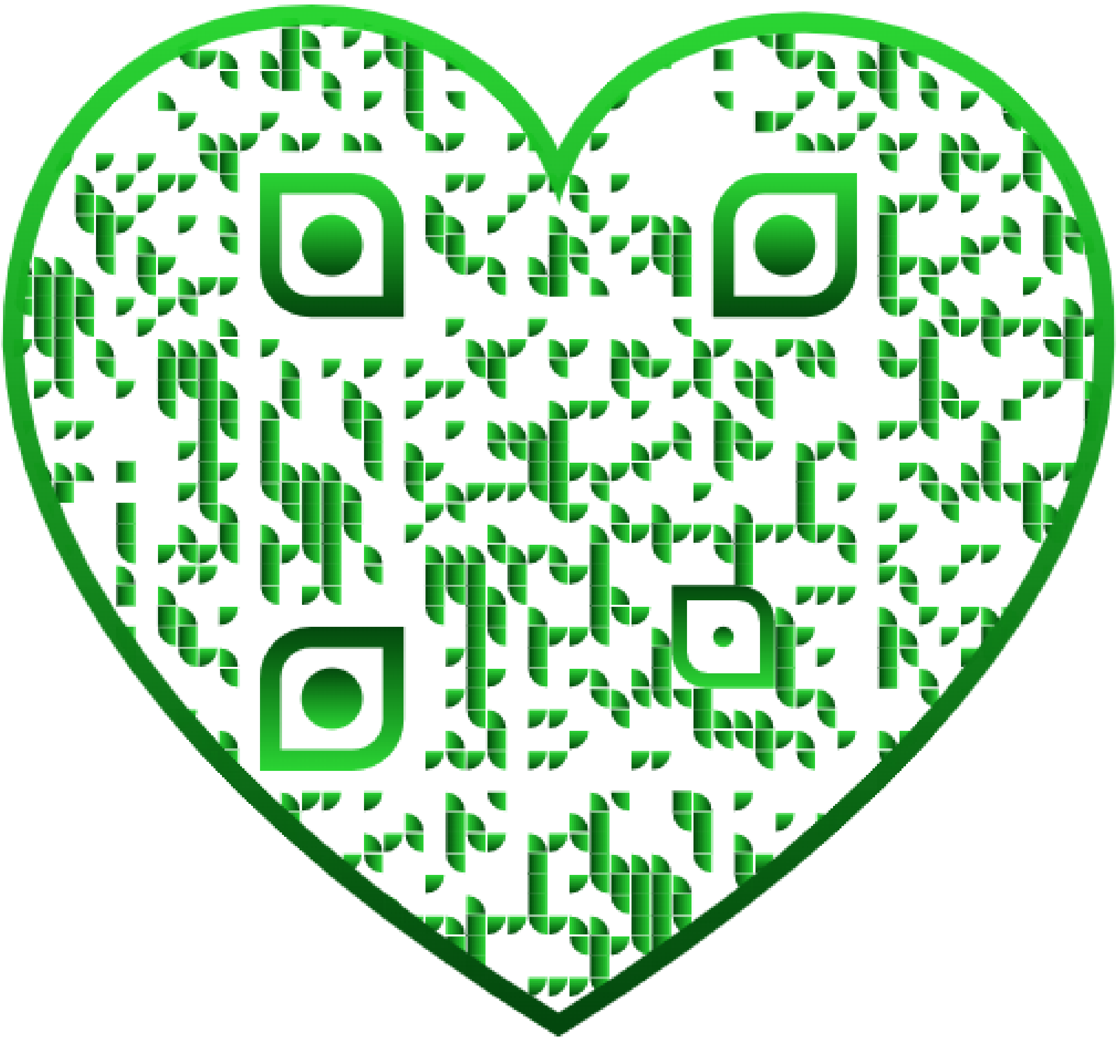

Bonsai Association Belgium presents

The Trophy 2026

international BONSAI show

28 Feb -1 Mar 2026

Demonstrations by Shinji SUZUKI and Hiroaki SUZUKI (Japan)

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- Tokonoma presentation by Nippon Bonsai Sakka Kyookai Europe
- Special prize for the best chokkan style bonsai
- Kakejiku (scroll) exhibition

General info and tickets
www.bonsaiassociation.be

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Translations:
Peter Warren

KINBON

Show case

After a bit of wandering during my first trip to Japan in the early 1990s, I stumbled upon a beautiful bonsai garden. Compared with all the ugliness of Tokyo, this was a true breath of fresh air. It was like stepping back in time, right into the set of Shogun: authentic traditional Japanese houses with tatami mats and tokonomas and, above all, impressive bonsai in the courtyard. I had never seen anything like this before and was deeply impressed. A friendly man welcomed me, and I quickly realised it was bonsai Master Kunio Kobayashi himself, wearing a typical summer yukata garment. He offered me green tea and showed me photos of a Danish karate champion who had been invited to work on his bonsai. Perhaps, given my height, he thought I was some kind of martial arts champion, too. Unfortunately, I had to disappoint him, but his encounter made a deep impression on me, and his garden further ignited my love for bonsai. Kunio is a much-loved bonsai Master who travels extensively around the world and enjoys showcasing his skills with a sense of theatricality.

In this issue, we feature an extensive demo of his, and this time he even brought along a chainsaw. 'It's not for show, but more for practicality,' Kunio firmly added.

The working methods of shohin expert Nobuyuki Hirose prove that yamadori isn't the only true path to bonsai. Although his bonsai do look like yamadori, they're not. Yamadori is becoming increasingly difficult to obtain in Japan, so Nobuyuki primarily works with material grown from cuttings. It requires a different approach, with several refined techniques, which he clearly shows you further in this issue.

And then we have the report from Harry Harrington, who showed his best bonsai in a beautiful old Japanese garden in the rolling hills of Central England. Because it's a private garden, he couldn't make a grand announcement, inviting all to come to see it. Happily, a fantastic photographer did come, and we have the photos as evidence showing what a great spectacle it proved to be.

Farrand Bloch
Chief editor

THIS ISSUE

Our Icons

Video available bonsaifocus.com

Scan the code with your phone

Beginner

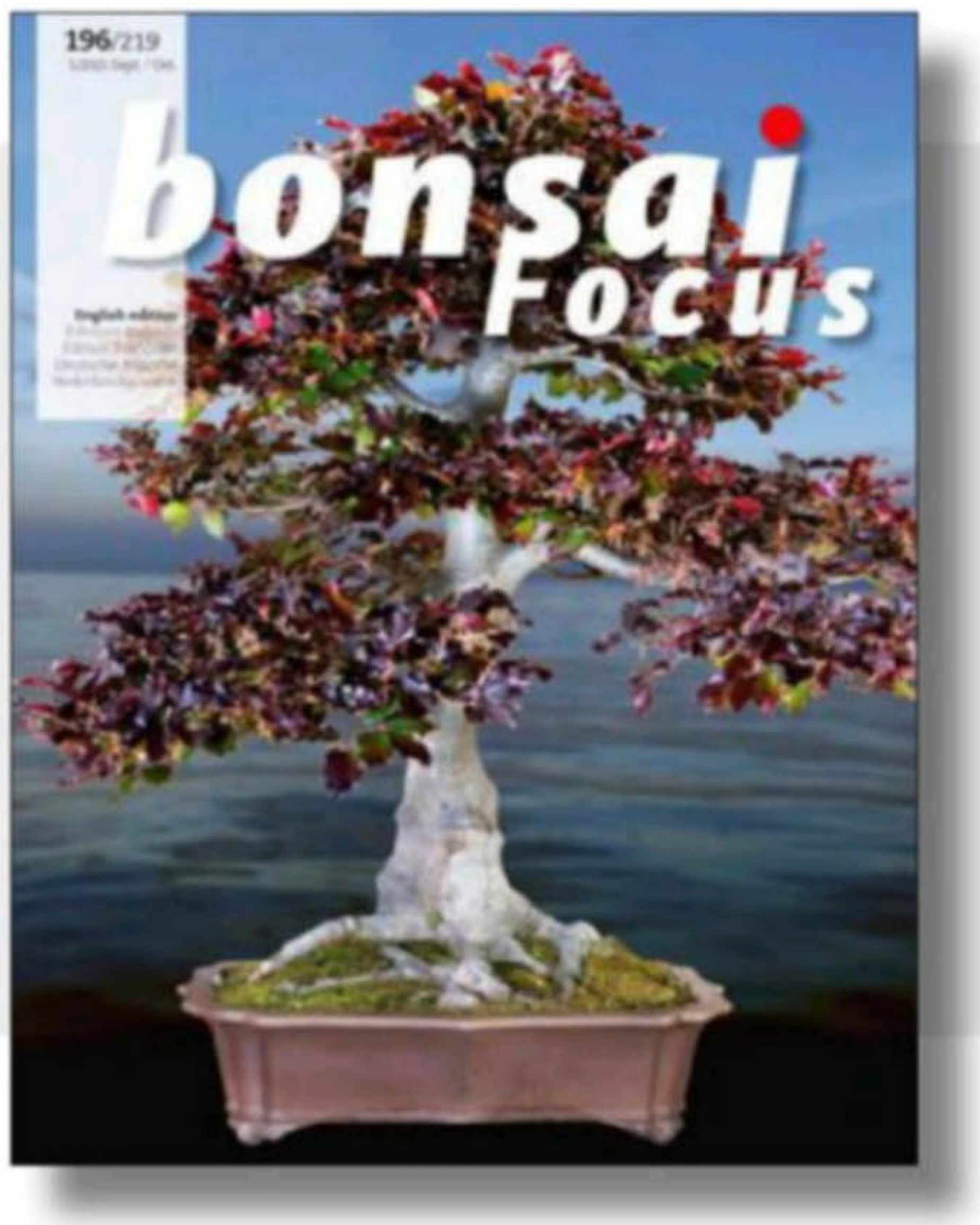
Advanced

Expert

On the cover

Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*).
Styled by Teunis Jan Klein

Photo: Bonsai Focus Studio



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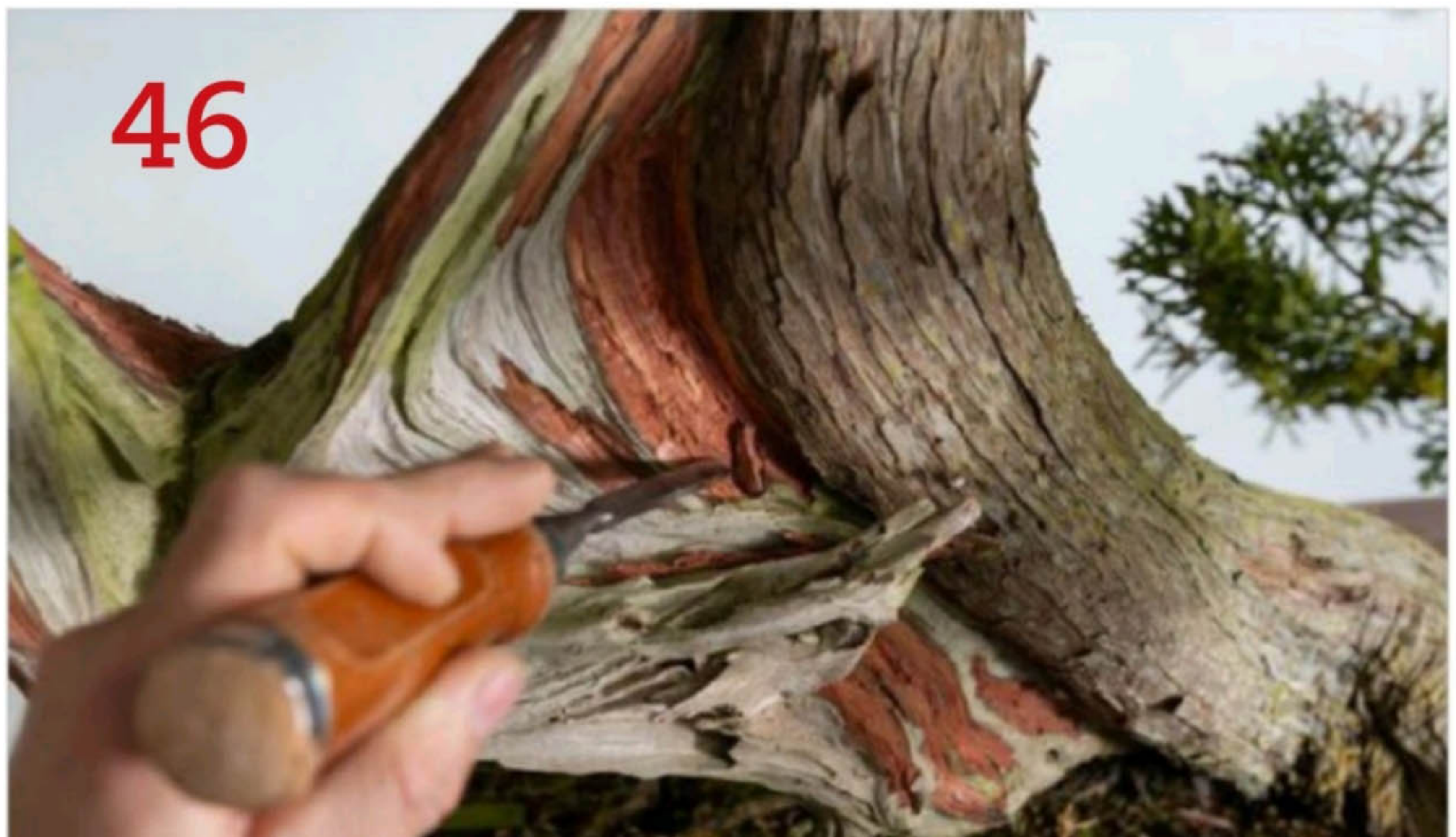
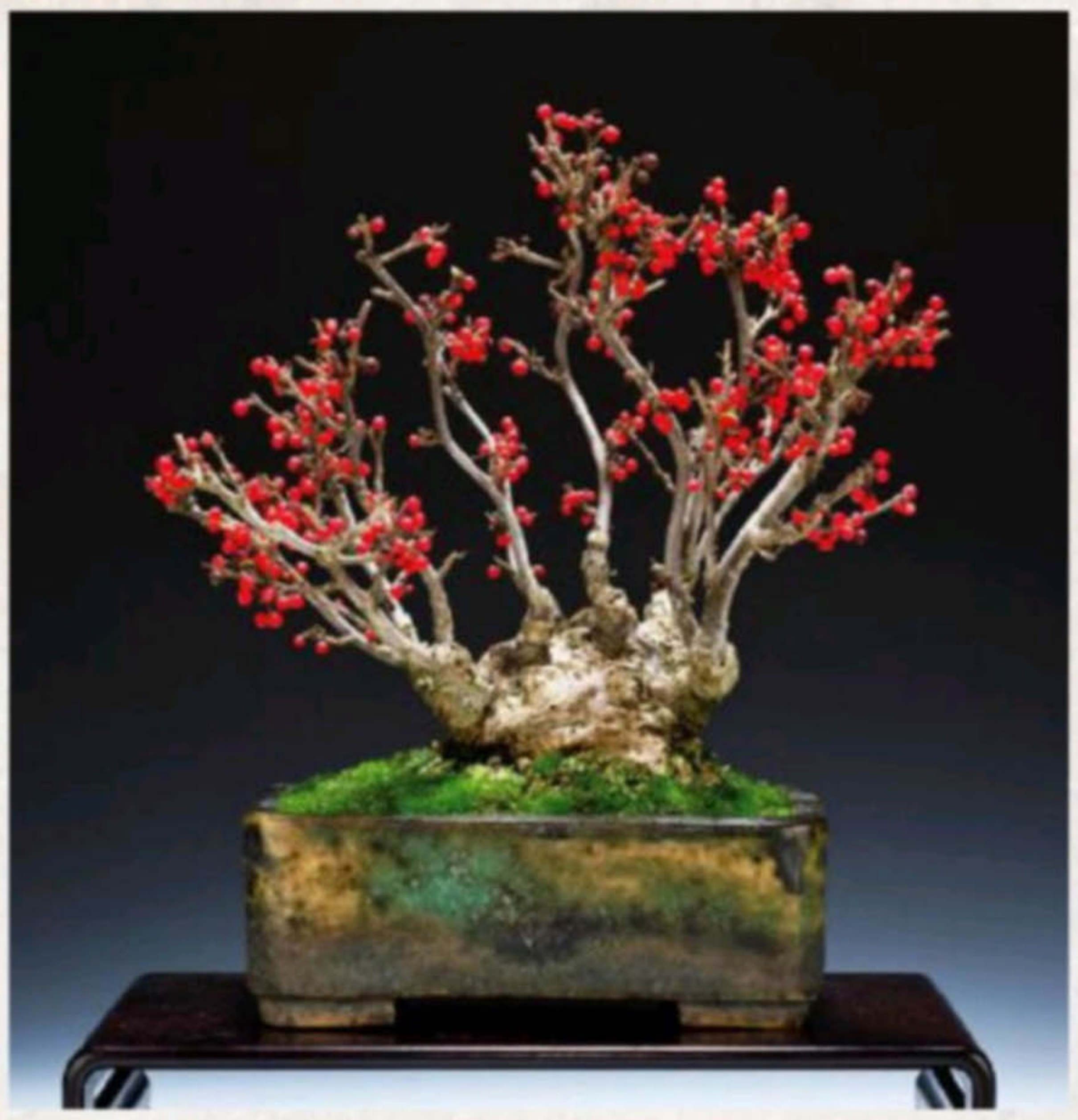
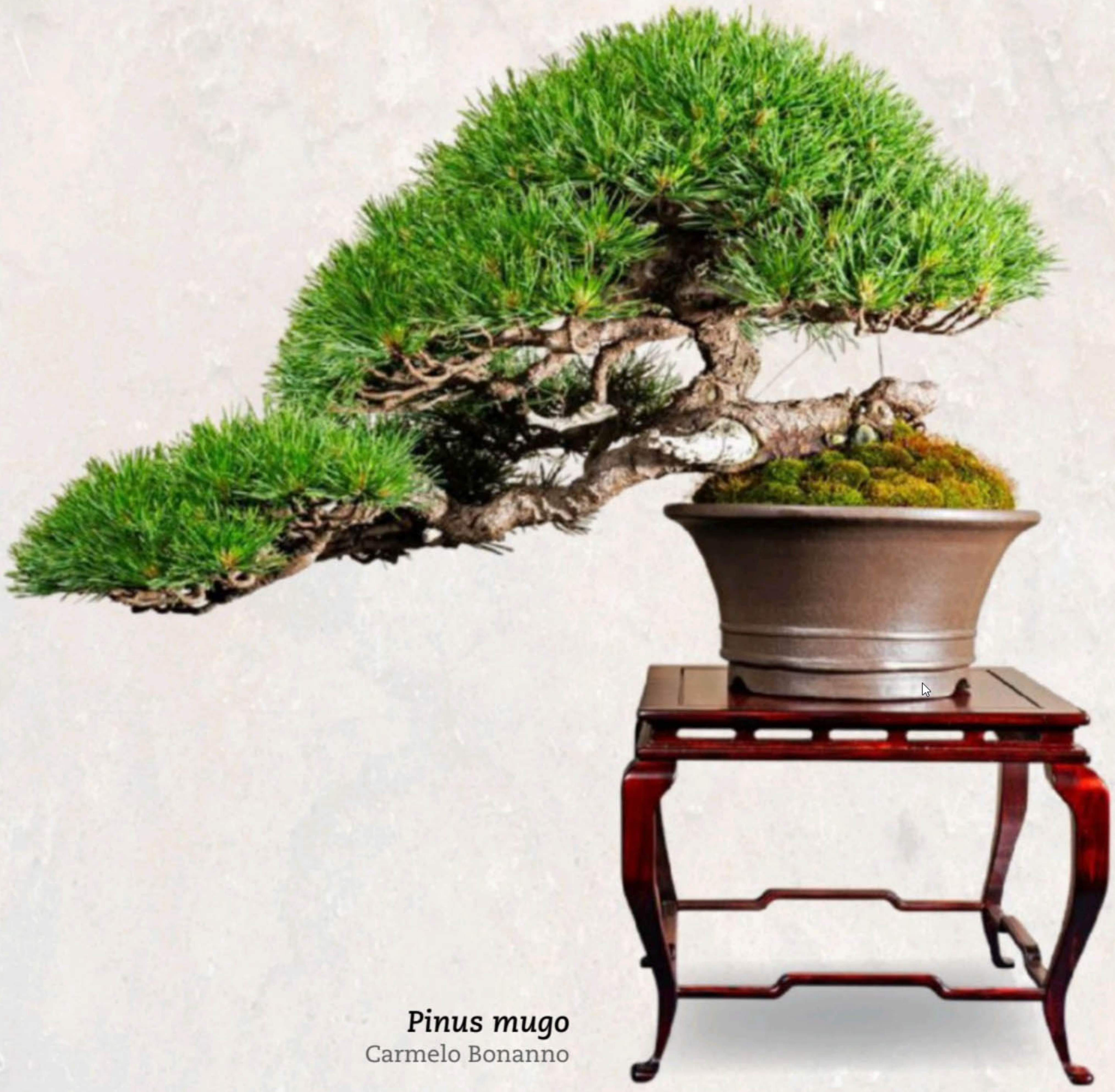
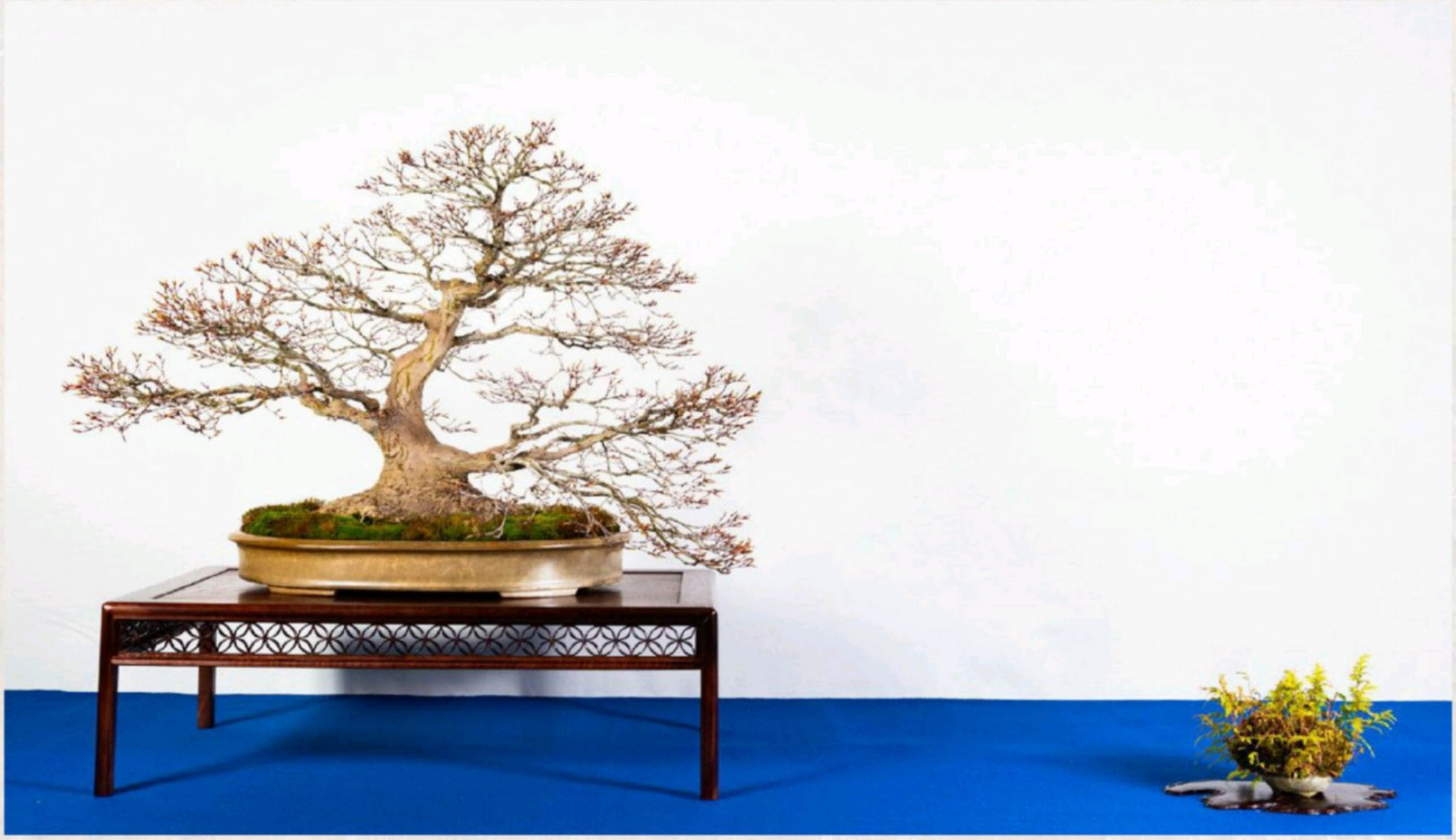




Shohin: Malus domestica
Pot: Tofukuji, Owner: Kinsaku Miyashita

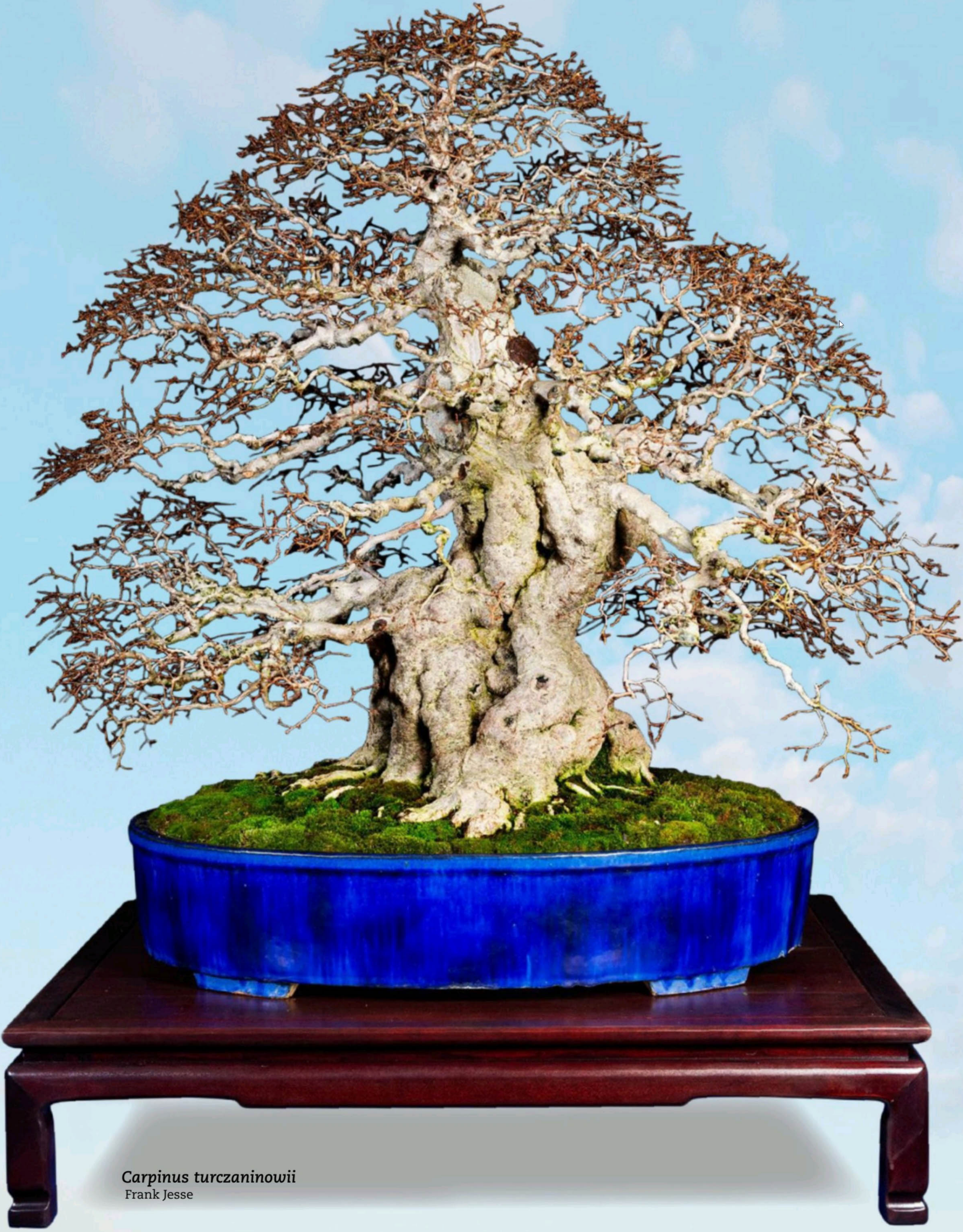


Pinus mugo
Carmelo Bonanno



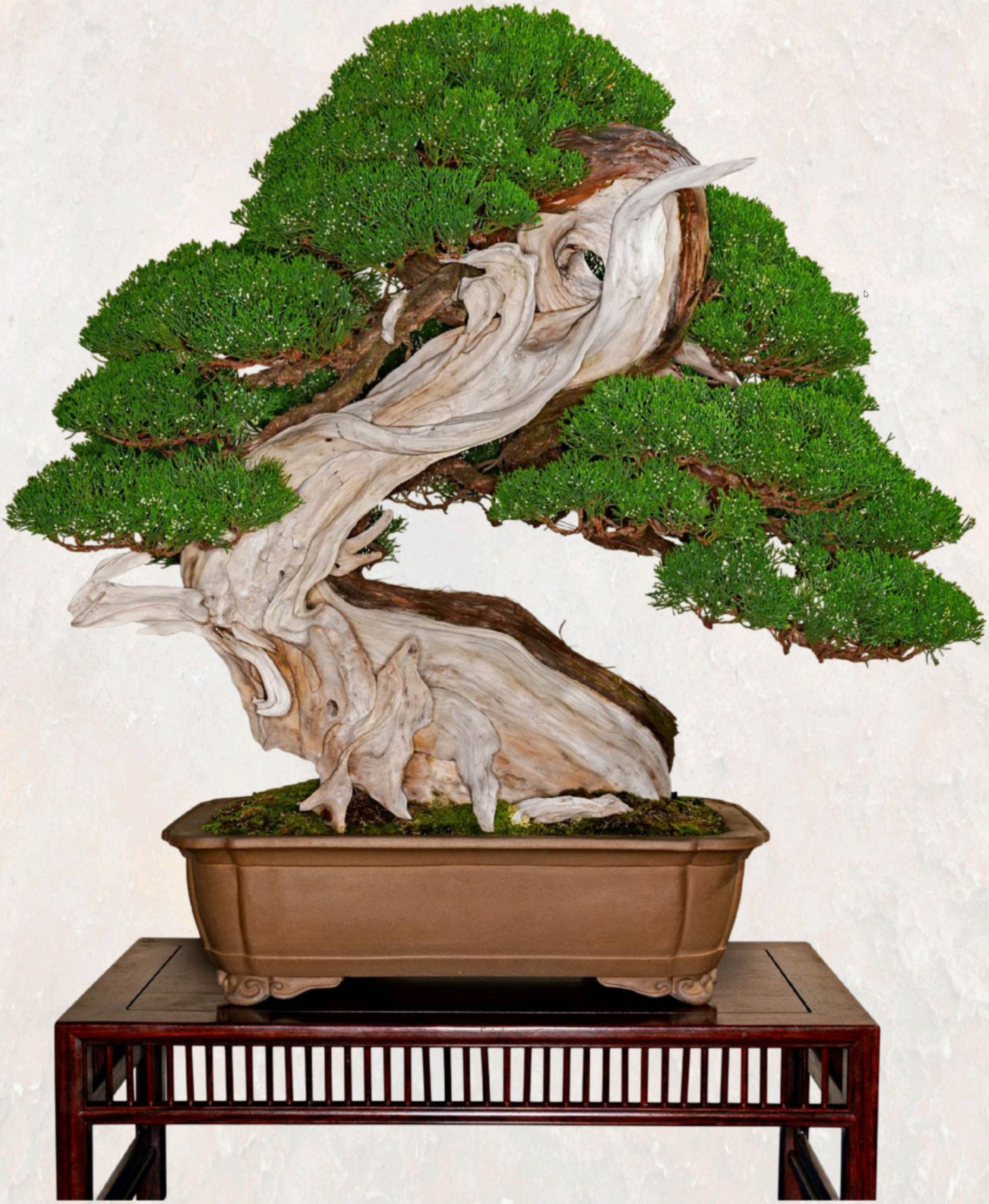
Acer palmatum "Seigen"
Alexandre Escudero

Photos:Bonsai Focus Studio



Carpinus turczaninowii
Frank Jesse

Juniperus chinensis Shimpaku
Kenichi Suzuki



Bonsai for diehards

The dynamism of bonsai in Quebec

Text: François Jeker Photography: xxxx

François Jeker travels yearly to Quebec to do demos and workshops. He has developed a special bond with this French-speaking corner of Canada

Trees grow in difficult conditions, on the banks of the St. Lawrence River as well as in the mountains.

A striking contrast can be seen between the difficulties of bonsai practice in this French speaking region of Canada and the huge enthusiasm of bonsai lovers and clubs.

Winters are long and harsh, tree species are limited, and the concept of distance is different from that in Europe. You could possibly travel five hours just to attend a workshop.

Omnipresent nature

It's a vast territory where only a small portion is occupied by humans: a few large cities and rare isolated houses. It boasts fantastic landscapes, mountains covered with dense forests, magical lakes, especially in the autumn with the colours of the maple trees, and wild shores along the St Lawrence River and the ocean. The only inhabitants are caribou, moose, bears, and wolves. This environment perhaps explains the unique relationship Quebecers have with nature.

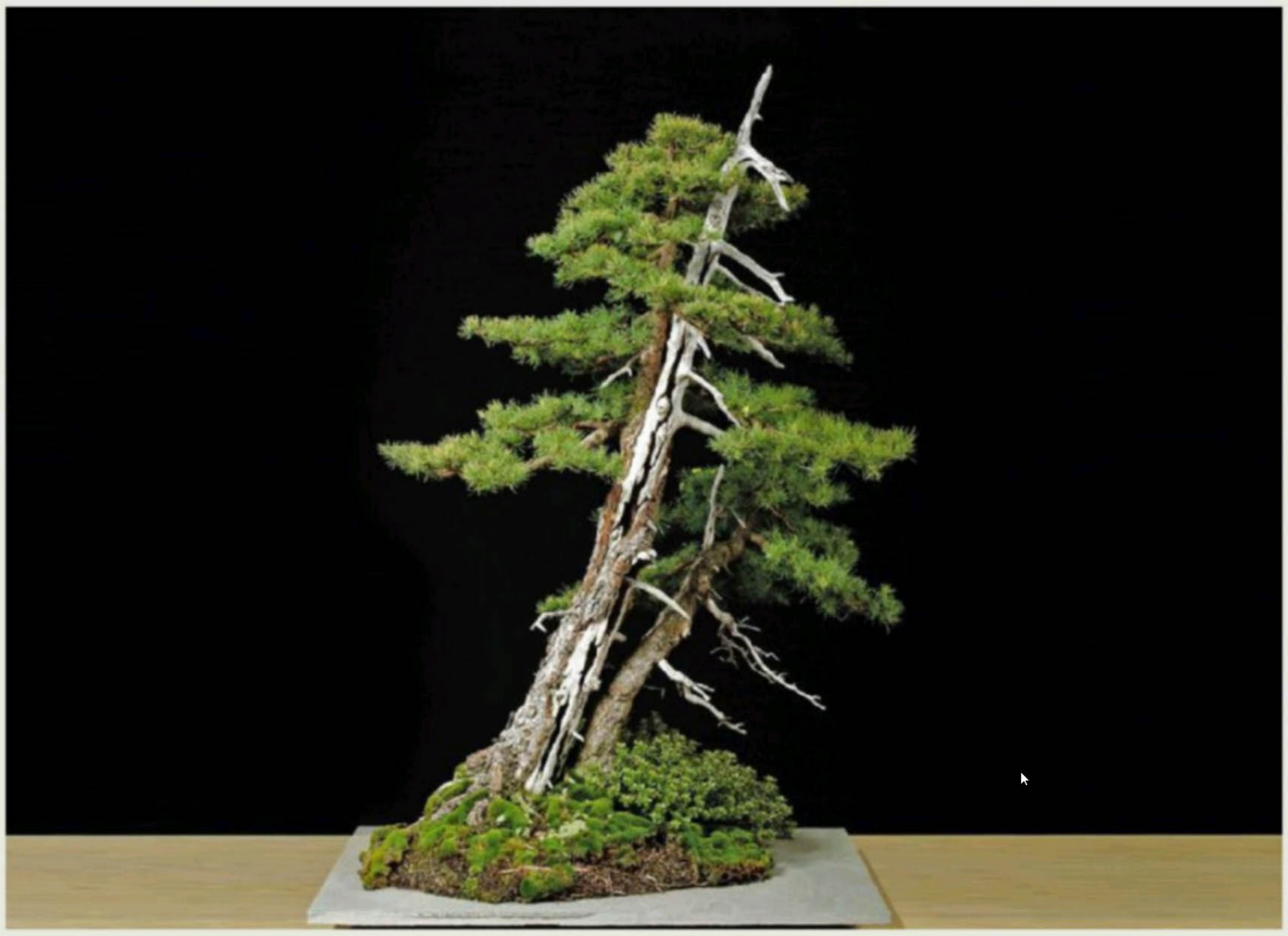
Michel Phaneuf, one of the pillars of Quebec bonsai, collecting a particular variety of larch on the "Côte Nord".

An accumulation of difficulties

Winter can well last six months, and it's common to have a metre of snow in your garden! It can sometimes take a few hours of shovelling to get out of the house in the morning.

Protecting bonsai during this season is therefore complicated. Those with a cold greenhouse are favoured. Otherwise, the trees are crammed into 'boxes' made of insulating materials; since these are hermetically sealed and covered with

A wintering box for the cold and snow, before closing


A fine example of native larch, very natural and accurately evoking Quebec trees, created by Nick Lenz

snow, the constant humidity provides a comfortable breeding ground for fungal diseases.

The local species are very limited; there are mainly *Thuja*, apple trees, jack pine, spruce. Unfortunately, while you can find some beautiful spruce specimens, they do not tolerate life in pots very well. But there is one king tree to compensate: the Canadian larch, the *Larix laricina*, which is extraordinary. It has thick, flaky bark like the old European Scots pines, its needles are very short, it naturally has beautiful deadwood and it is perfectly resistant to extreme cold; it can stay outside all year round.

Ties with Montreal

Its 50th anniversary will be celebrated in 2028! It currently has more than 530 members, making it the largest bonsai society in the West, and it organizes an average of 110 activities per year, as well as an annual exhibition, plus, in the past, several international conferences. Each year, it invites experts from Japan, Europe, and North America. It is associated with the Montreal Botanical Garden, which has a fine collection of bonsai and penjing trees.

The collections

There are five bonsai collections at the Montreal Botanical Garden, which are exhibited in dedicated spaces, which can provide the best possible living conditions for trees, regardless of their origin. These trees come from Japan, North China, South China (collection offered by Wu Yee-Sun), Vietnam (collection offered by Quoc Kiet Tang) and North America, with bonsai created by John Naka and Nick Lenz, for example.

Above: Daniel Lepage is the president of the SBPM and has the difficult task of steering this ship.
Below: American larch by David-Easterbrook

> *It's common to have a metre of snow in your garden*

Human resources

Quebecers are very pleasant people and compensate for their harsh climate with warm, simple, direct human relationships. The world of bonsai in this province is particularly abundant here, thanks to the presence of the Montreal Botanical Garden, one of the largest in the world, the creation of the SBPM (Montreal Bonsai and Penjing Society), and the numerous remarkable personalities who are true driving forces in the practice of our art.

Passionate bonsai lovers

To fully understand the practice of bonsai in Quebec, nothing beats the example of Marie-Claude Tessier's journey. She began her apprenticeship in 2006, benefitted from the teaching of some of the biggest names in Quebec bonsai, and she is now a trainer and major player in the SBPM, especially for beginners on tropical trees: *Ficus*, *Coprosmas*, *Syzigiums*.

Yves Létourneau is one of few pre-bonsai producers in the country and has his own bonsai collection. He was the mentor for Marie-Claude, enabling her to acquire the basic knowledge for bonsai.

David is a fountain of knowledge in the field of phytosanitary care, and always available to offer advice on tree health, or choosing a pot. Hundreds of enthusiasts, including Marie-Claude, are grateful to him for sharing his passion for trees with them.

Michel Phaneuf, a graphic designer by profession, is the specialist on *Taxus*. It was he who developed the aesthetic aspect of bonsai naturally. He says that, 'What's important is not the technique, but the vision of the tree.' He helped Marie-Claude transform nursery plants into real bonsai over time.

Together, we designed and carried out projects on raw yamadori trees, and we also concentrated on the maturation of some of her trees.

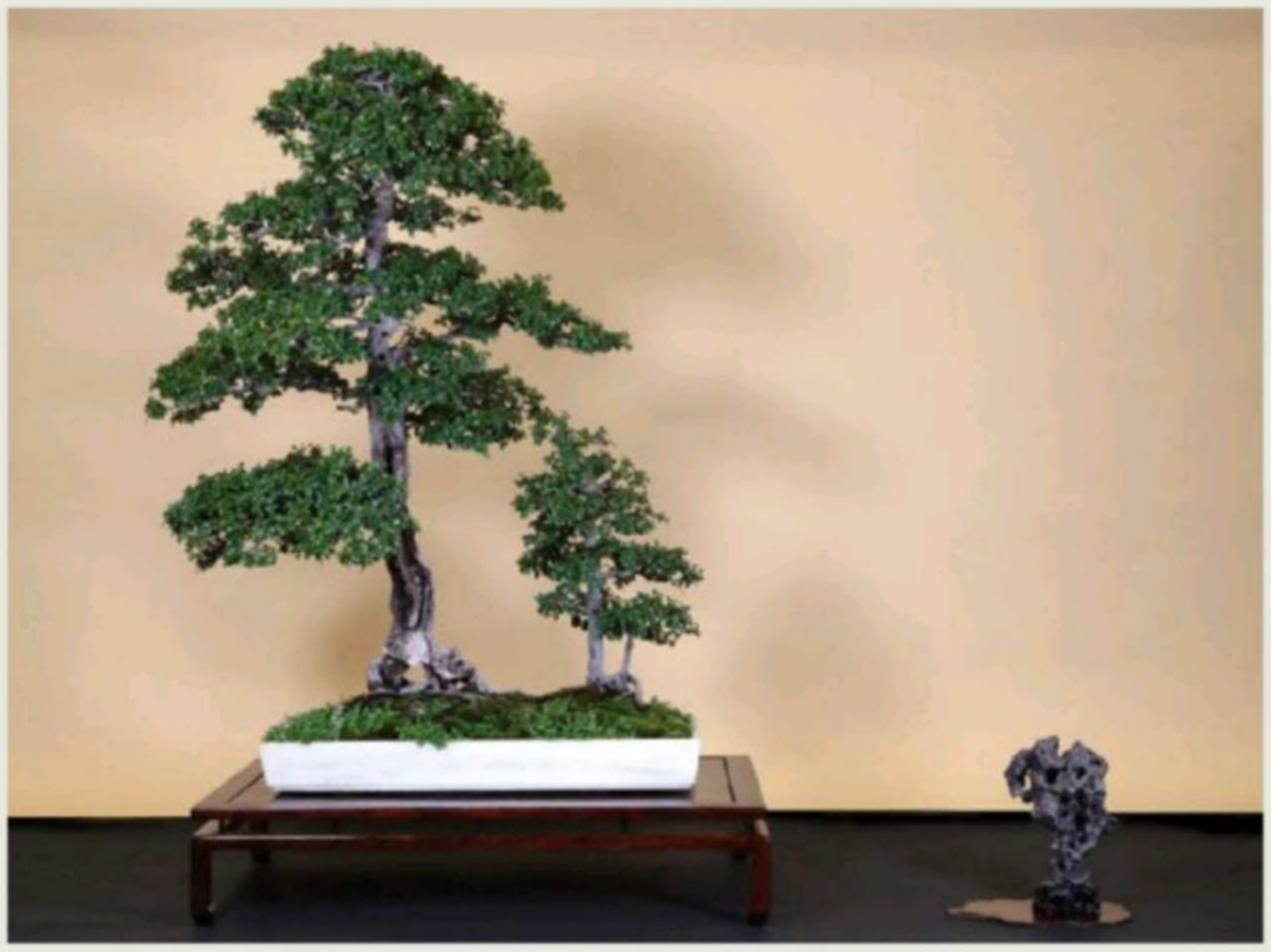
Le Jardin céleste

Some penjing remain in the greenhouse

François Jeker with Marie-Claude Tessier showing development of a native larch.

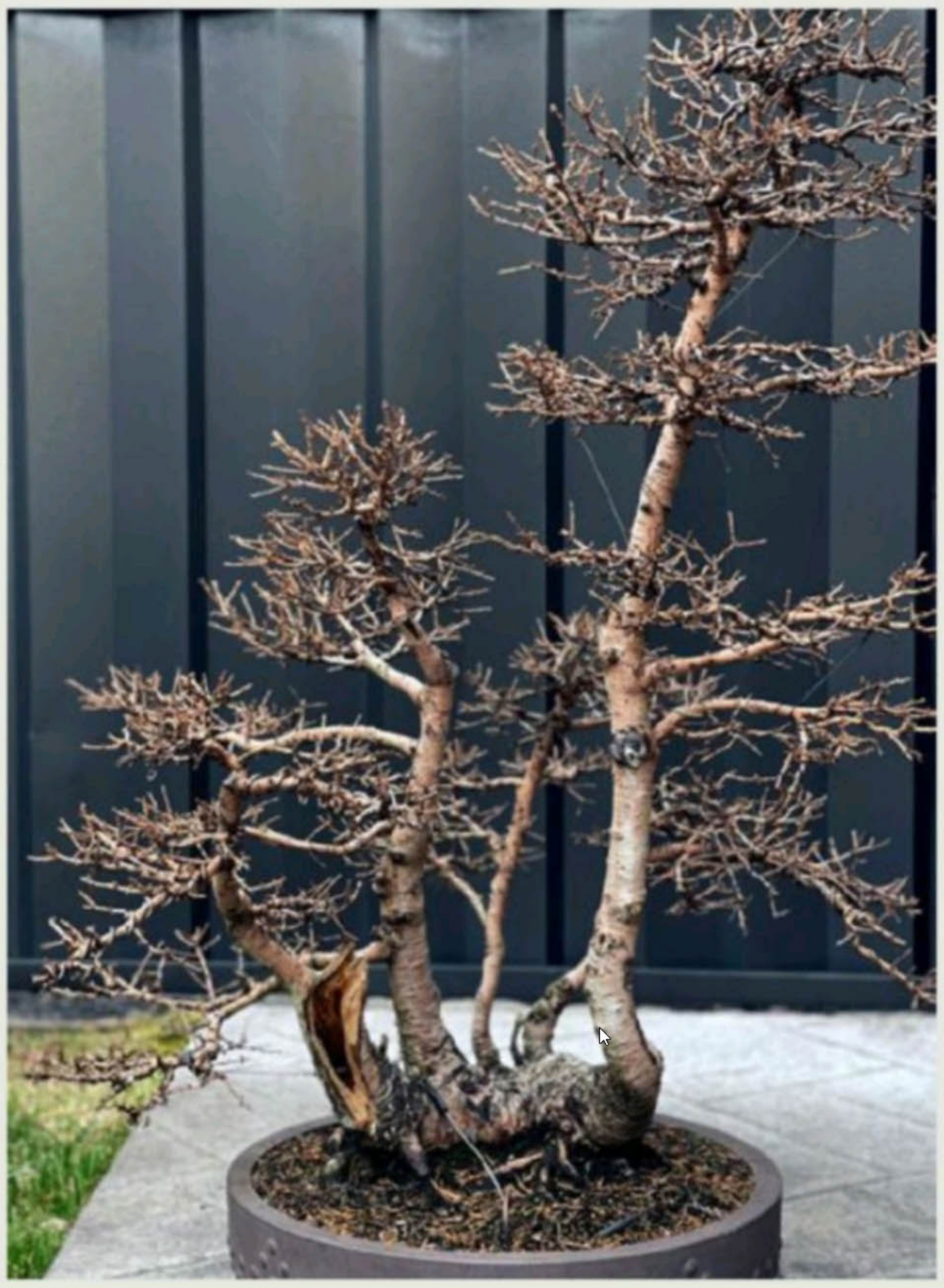
Another area is displayed in the garden during summer

Below left: Penjing collection of the Montreal Botanical Garden. Below right: A **Sageretia** *from the museum collection*



CERCLE D'ÉTUDES
KARAMATSU

Karamatsu means larch in Japanese. It's a gathering of highly-experienced bonsai enthusiasts who work together every month. They are members of the SBPM and also key players in developing the bonsai society: teachers, demonstrators, two former SBPM presidents, Jean Dumaine and Michel Phaneuf, and David Easterbrook, who was responsible for the botanical garden's collection. I've been an associate member since 2001



Another example of Larix laricina *in winter, created by Marie-Claude Tessier*

> ***There's nothing you can do with a dead tree***

Since 2006, Marie-Claude has developed a very sound approach to bonsai practice. First, prioritise the tree's good health,' she says. Then think about shaping it. 'Taking your time, proceed in careful stages. There's nothing you can do with a dead tree,' she says jokingly.
After doing many apprenticeships with experts; she finds her duty is to pass on her knowledge, gained from the bonsai Masters and her own experience with bonsai.

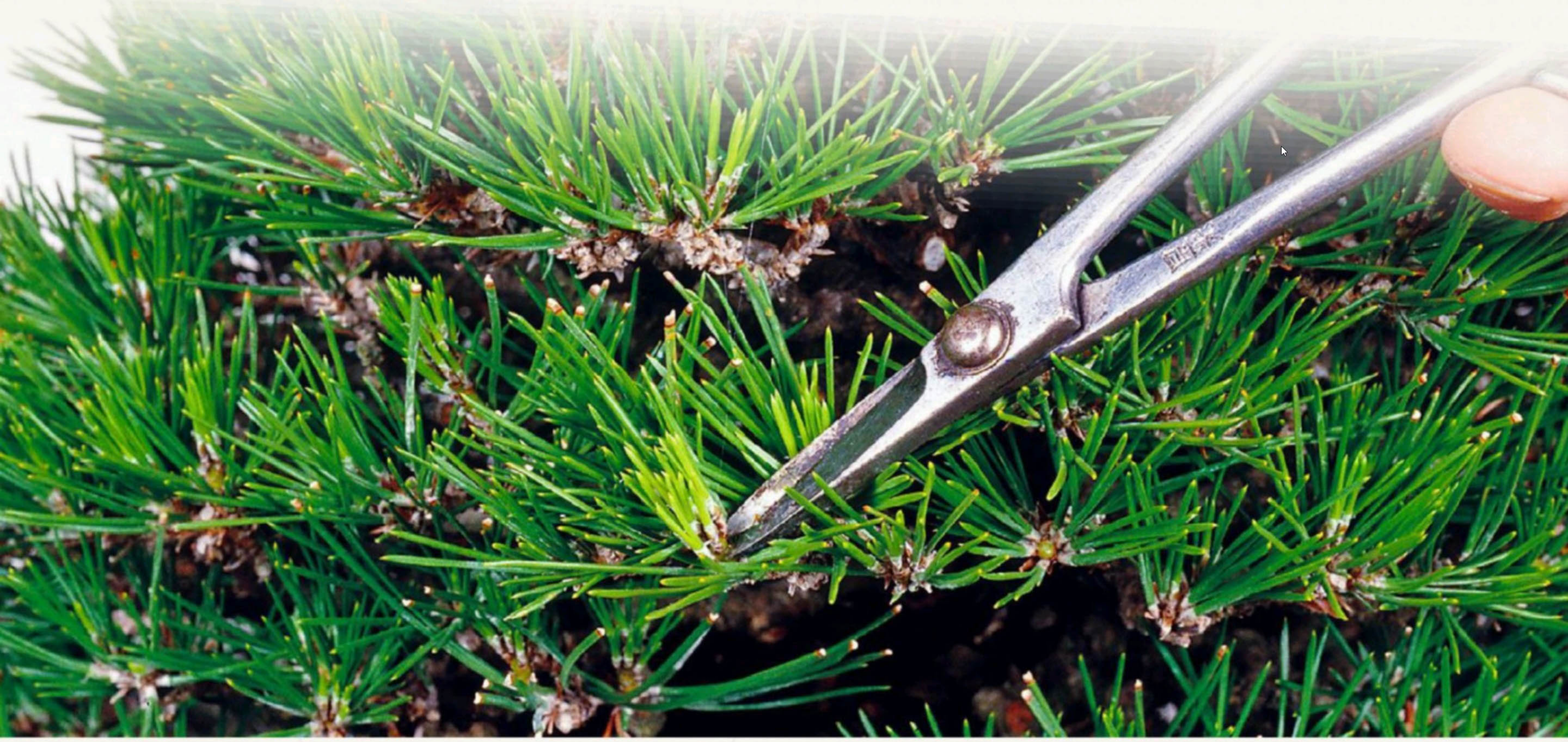
The challenges of practicing the art of bonsai in Quebec are offset by passion, motivation, enthusiasm of the SBPM members, and the extra strong sense of camaraderie.
If you have the chance to visit Montreal, don't hesitate to go to the collections at the Botanical Garden and contact the SBPM through their website: bonsaimontreal.com
Take the opportunity of meeting quality trees and diehard bonsai lovers.

An overview of the North American bonsai collection at the Montreal Botanical Garden.

Complex, but fascinating

A guide to black pine candle cutting, bud thinning, needle plucking, needle and branch thinning

Text and photography: Kinbon, Japan



First cut-off two-step trimming: only trim weak buds, or weak to medium-strength buds. The boundary between strength levels varies depending on the tree, so it can be quite difficult to judge

From candle pinching to candle cutting, bud thinning, removal of old needles, and plucking of new leaves — a complete system of candle cutting. Anyone growing Japanese black pine bonsai knows candle cutting is a most important and effective technique. But while it's called mekiri or candle cutting, the methods vary depending on the tree's condition and the intended purpose. Its complexity can be a source of confusion, but it is also part of what makes it fascinating. Here, we provide a summary of candle cutting, as well as related tasks that can be undertaken simultaneously.

Standard method of candle cutting

Candle cutting achieves a variety of effects, such as shortening needle length, increasing number of branches, evening out bud strength, shortening internodes to control the branch extensions. Candle cutting techniques can be summarized according to the stage of development of the tree:

- Finished trees: Perform a single trim, cutting from weak to strong buds at once. Extremely weak buds should be left untouched.
- Semi-finished or trees in training, trees being reworked: Start by cutting weak to medium-strength buds (leave very weak ones), then cut strong buds about one to two weeks later — this is known as two-step trimming.
- In the early stage of development (e.g. young trees): Cut only strong buds. If a particularly strong bud is to be used as a branch leader, it can be partially trimmed (also called middle candle cutting), and the leaf buds appearing between the new leaves and the base of the stem are then utilized.

Regardless of the stage of development, trees with large variations in bud strength should undergo two- or even three-step trimming.

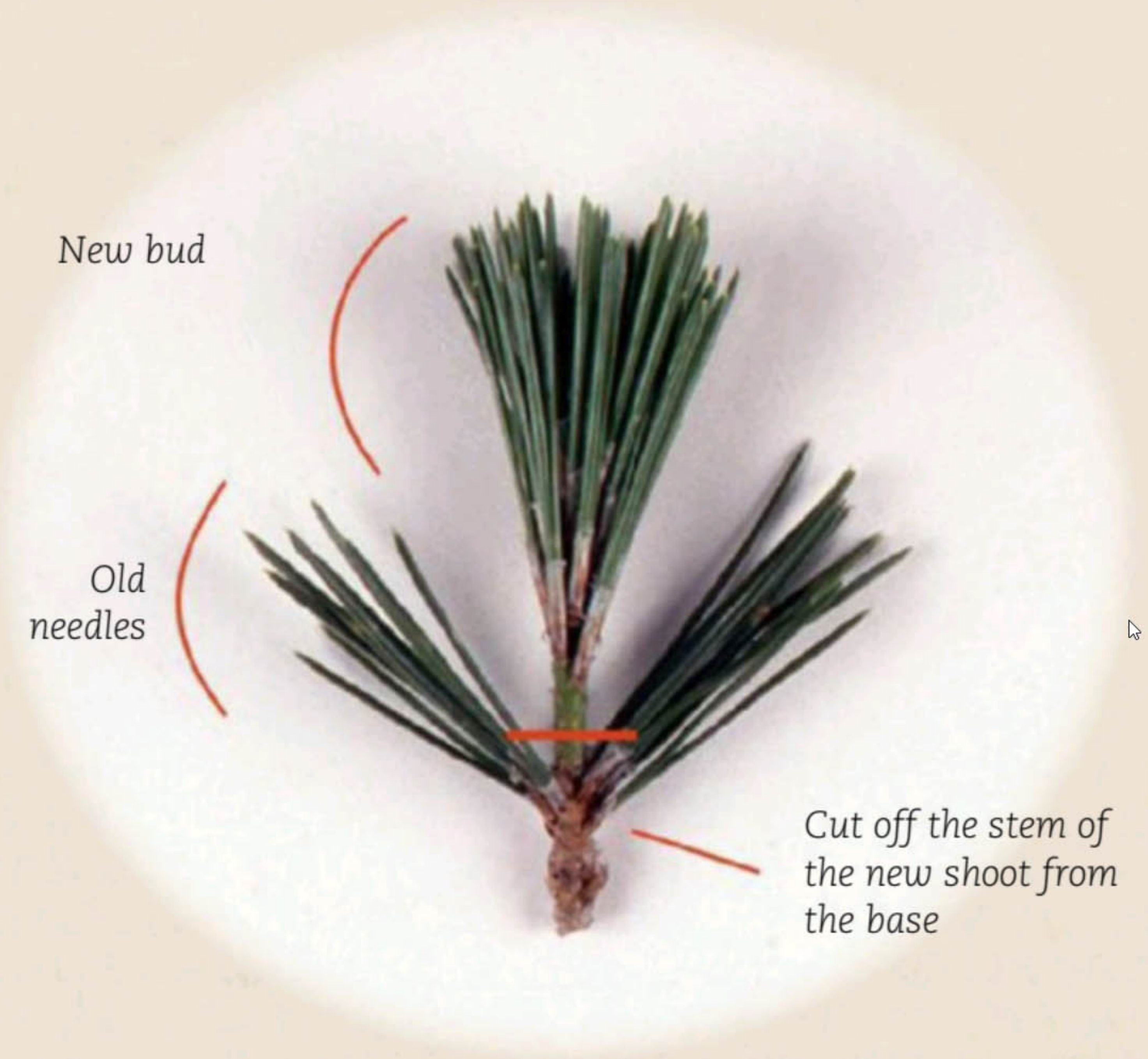
There is also a similar technique called 'autumn shoot cutting', but is carried out at a different time of year, for different tree types and purposes, and should not be confused with the standard trimming methods (introduced separately).

Timing and process of candle cutting

The best time is when new buds have extended to a certain length in spring, like a candle and the needles have begun to open and grow. In terms of the season, this is usually from mid-June to early July. The exact timing, though, varies by region and cultivation conditions. The period mentioned refers to areas from Tokai westward to Kyushu and Shikoku. In the regions more north like Tohoku or Hokkaido, bud growth is often not yet sufficient at that time, so trimming is typically done later. The safest approach is to judge by the bud development while using the calendar as a general guide.

Position for trimming:

Cut at the line between the old needle and the new stem. Use scissors at a right angle to the stem. Fine-bladed scissors designed for this job are ideal, though ordinary pruning scissors can also be used



Single trimming: Around 10–15 June

This applies to medium and large trees. For small or miniature bonsai, where a finer finish is desired, the work is delayed until early to mid-July. These are typically done with a single trimming.

First cut of two-step trimming: around 10–15 June (same as single trimming)

After cutting, secondary buds begin to form around the trimmed area at once. By the time of the second trimming, these buds will have grown to the size of sesame or rice grains.

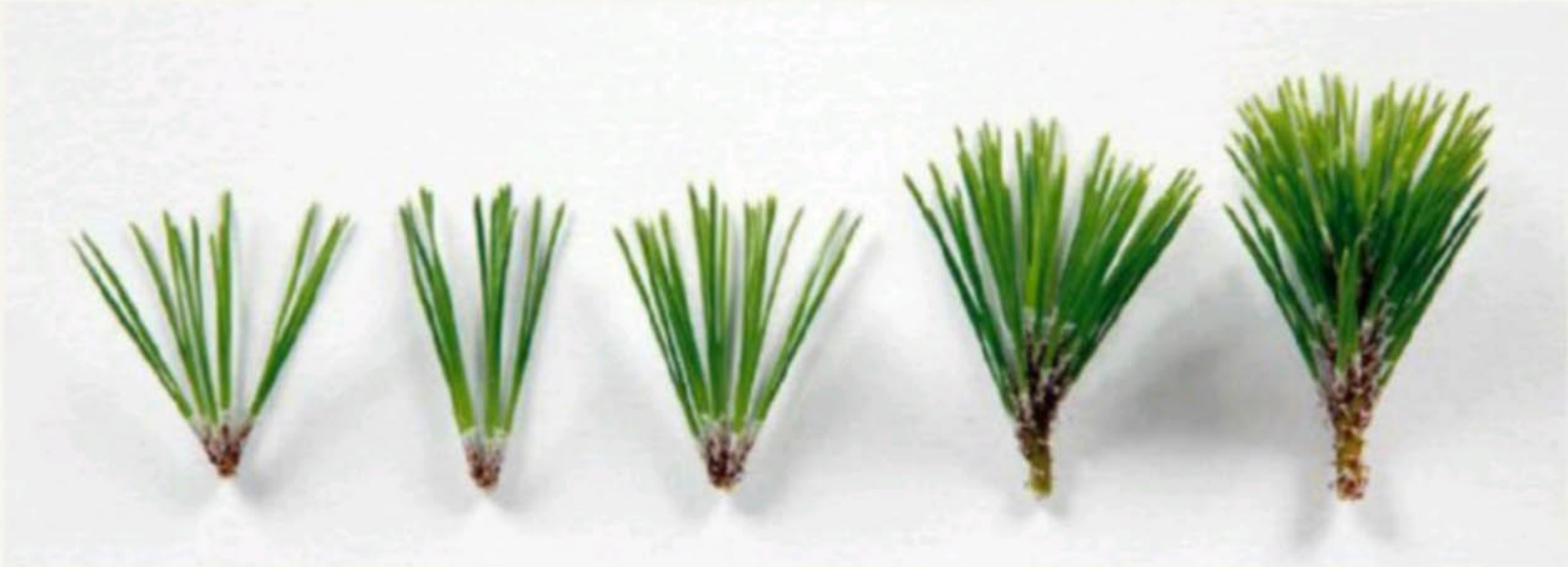
Second cut of two-step trimming: About one week to ten days after the first cut

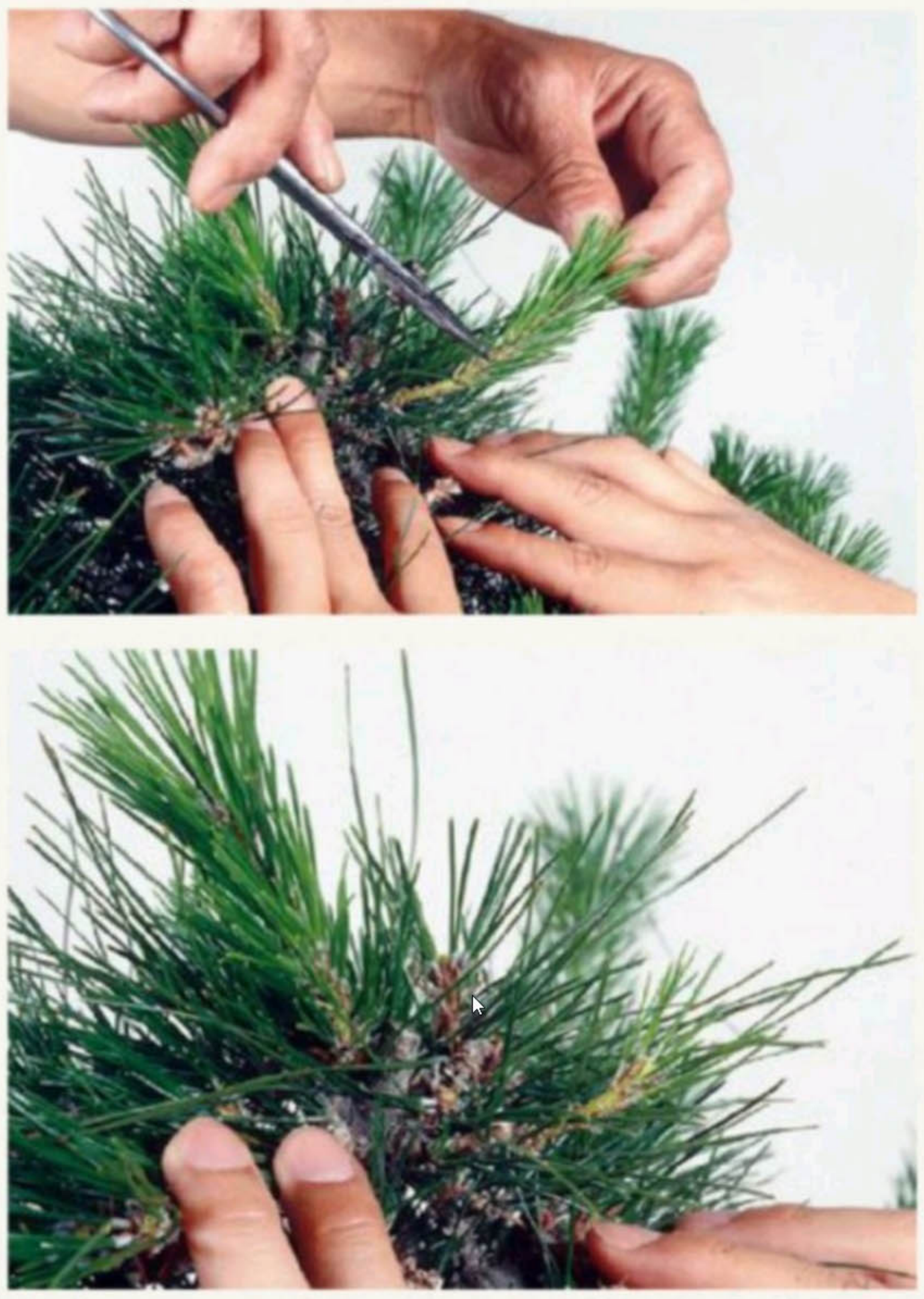
Because the parts cut in the second round are stronger, the formation and extension of secondary buds progress more quickly, and by around October, when second flush extension halts, they will have mostly evened out in length and vigour. This is the goal.

The actual task of cutting new buds is simple and easy, even for beginners. Just cutting is not enough to achieve uniform bud strength, however. Whether using a single or two-step method, the buds cut in each round will naturally vary, which leads to inconsistency in the final growth. To assist in balancing bud strength, techniques such as needle adjustment (plucking new needles or old needles) and 'leaving the stem' are used.

Judging candles for trimming and techniques for adjusting bud or shoot vigour

Judging which candles to cut:
Example of buds trimmed during the first stage of a two-step trimming. Larger (stronger) buds than these are cut during the second stage. Smaller (weaker) buds are left untouched





Midway candle cutting
Unlike standard candle cutting: This method leaves a portion of the new needles intact when you cut. It is applied only to particularly strong shoots. New buds are encouraged to develop at both the new and old needles, while the remaining stem is used to form the branch structure

Needle adjustment

In the case of two-step cutting, when weak candles are cut during the first round, the needles on the stronger shoots are also plucked at the same time to help suppress vigour. In both single and two-step trimming, old needle adjustment is carried out during candle cutting to help balance bud strength. Weak areas are left untouched, while the stronger the shoot the more needles are removed.

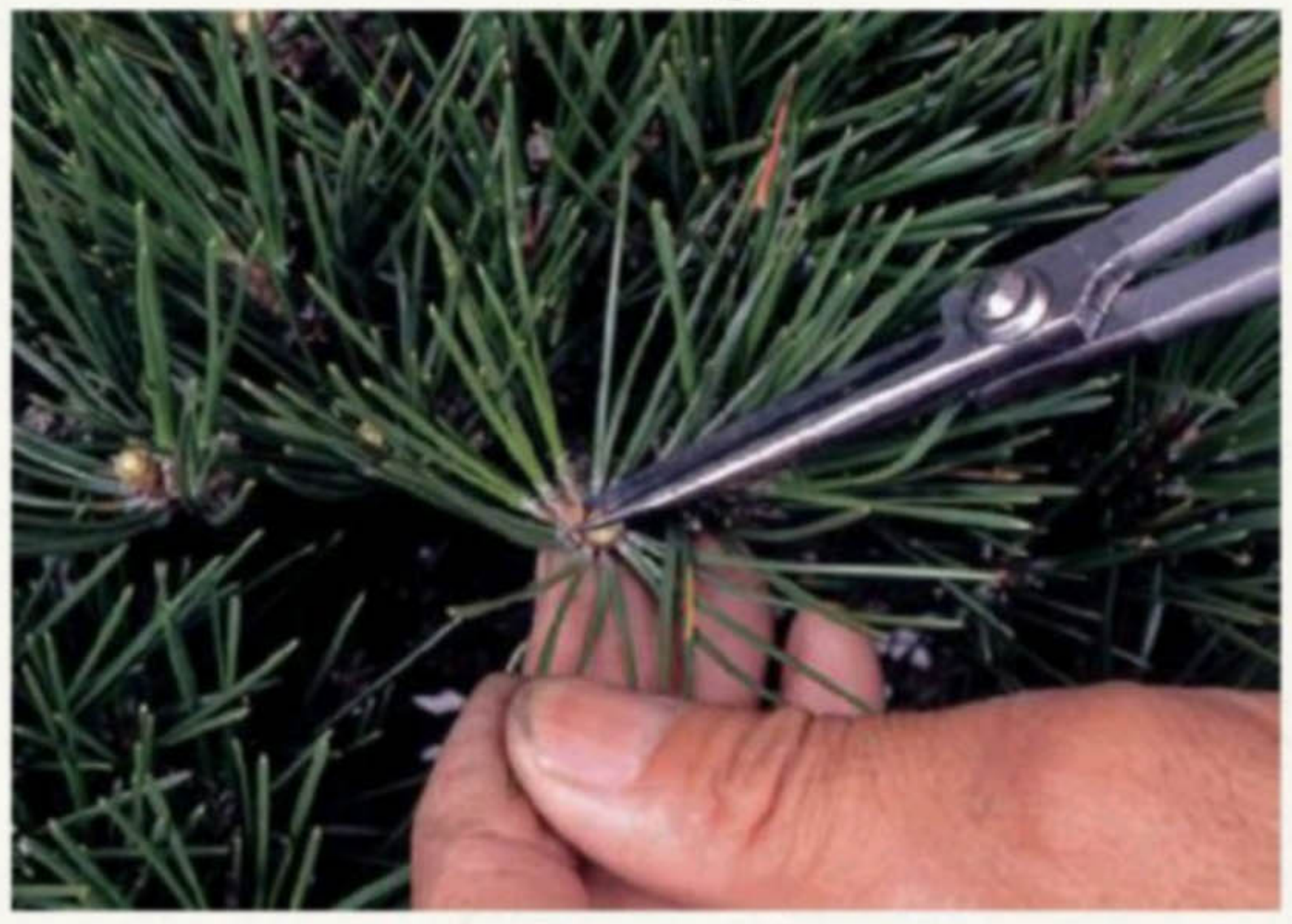
Leaving the stem

In normal candle cutting, the scissors are inserted between the old needle and the new shoot stem, meaning the new stem is almost completely removed. However, this method involves cutting while leaving a longer portion of the stem base, which delays the emergence of the secondary bud. The longer the remaining stem, the greater the suppressive effect. It is used to control strong areas during a single trimming or the second cut of a two-step trim. It is a useful technique with a modest bud-strength equalising effect. But, for a clean branch structure, it is better to prune the remaining stem base later, which can be a bit of extra work.

Midway cutting

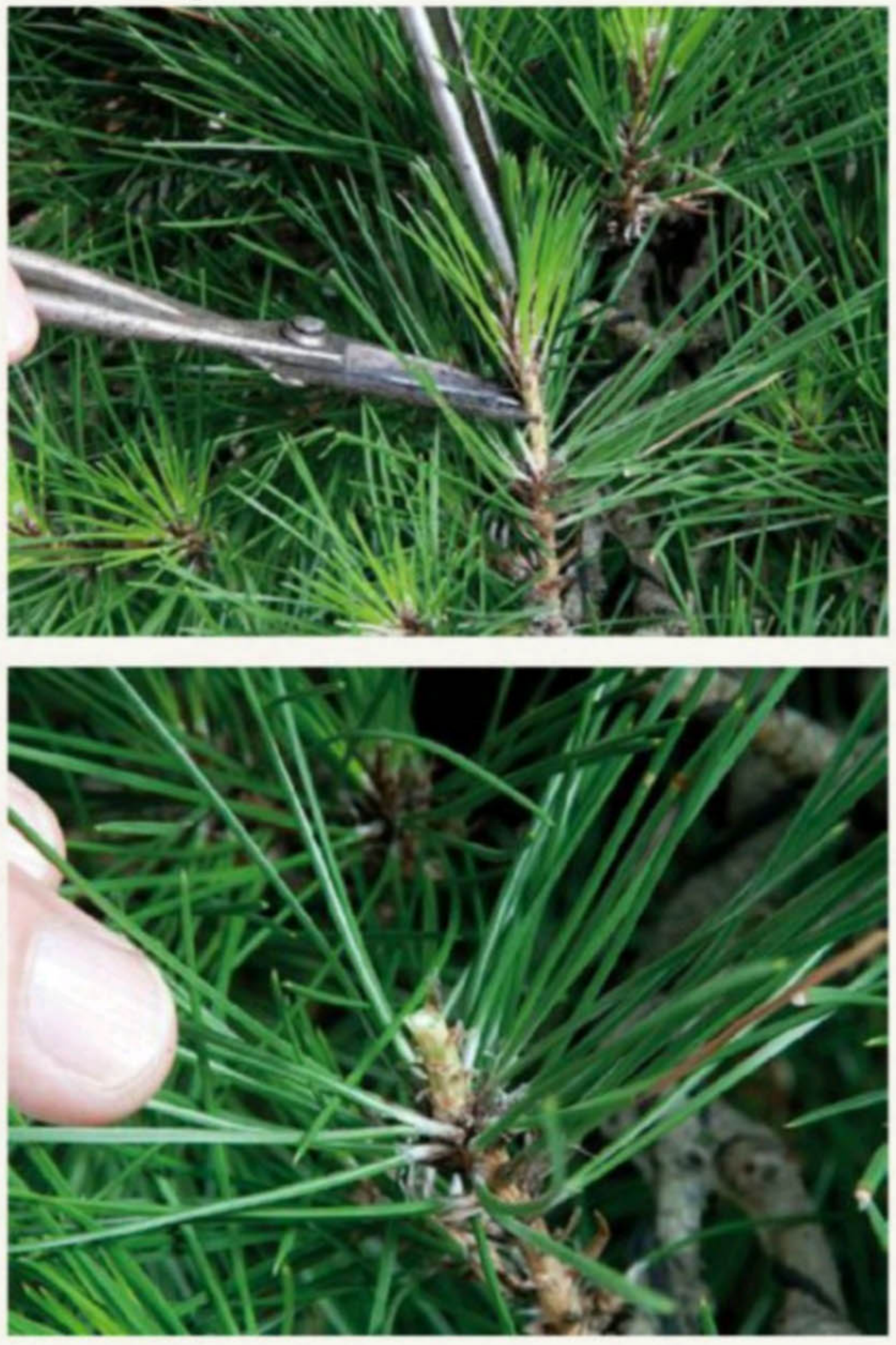
Similar to the 'leaving the stem' method, this involves cutting at the point where some new needles remain along the stem. The technique encourages new buds to sprout from those remaining new needles or from the old needles at the base of the stem. It is used for branches being re-worked, branches behind in development, or those you may want to extend in the future. It is often used in early stages of tree development and is effective for building branch structure.

Lateral bud management



In vigorous black pines, very small 'lateral buds' often appear next to new buds. The scissors are pointing to one of these. If left, once secondary buds emerge, the growth tips may become too crowded due to their proximity. If the lateral buds aren't needed, they should be removed during candle cutting

Leaving the stem

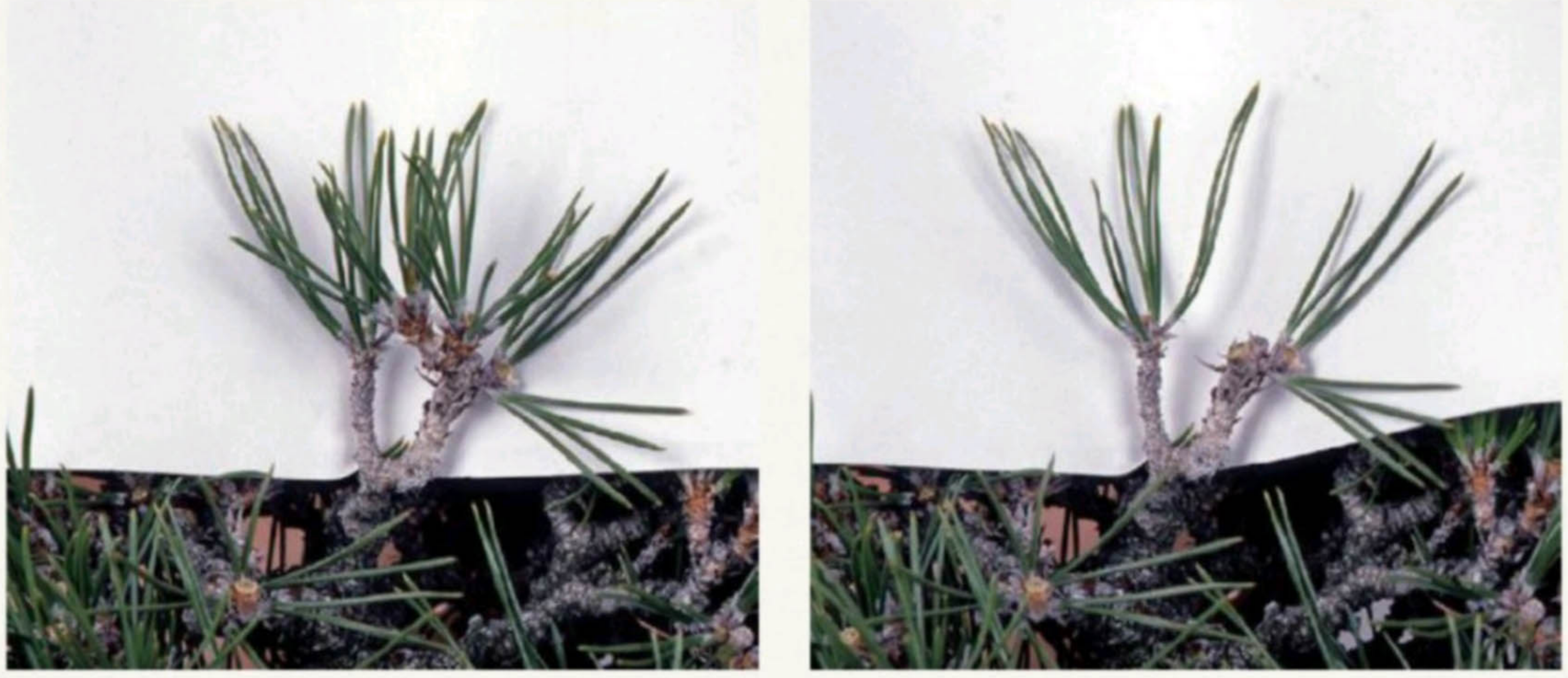


A technique for adjusting strength during single trimming. If you anticipate that the new bud for the second flush of growth will become too vigorous, cut slightly above the base instead of removing the candle entirely. This delays the growth of secondary bud and helps moderate its strength. The effect is limited in a single year, but when done repeatedly over several years, it makes a noticeable difference. The remaining part of the stem is shortened once the secondary bud has hardened.

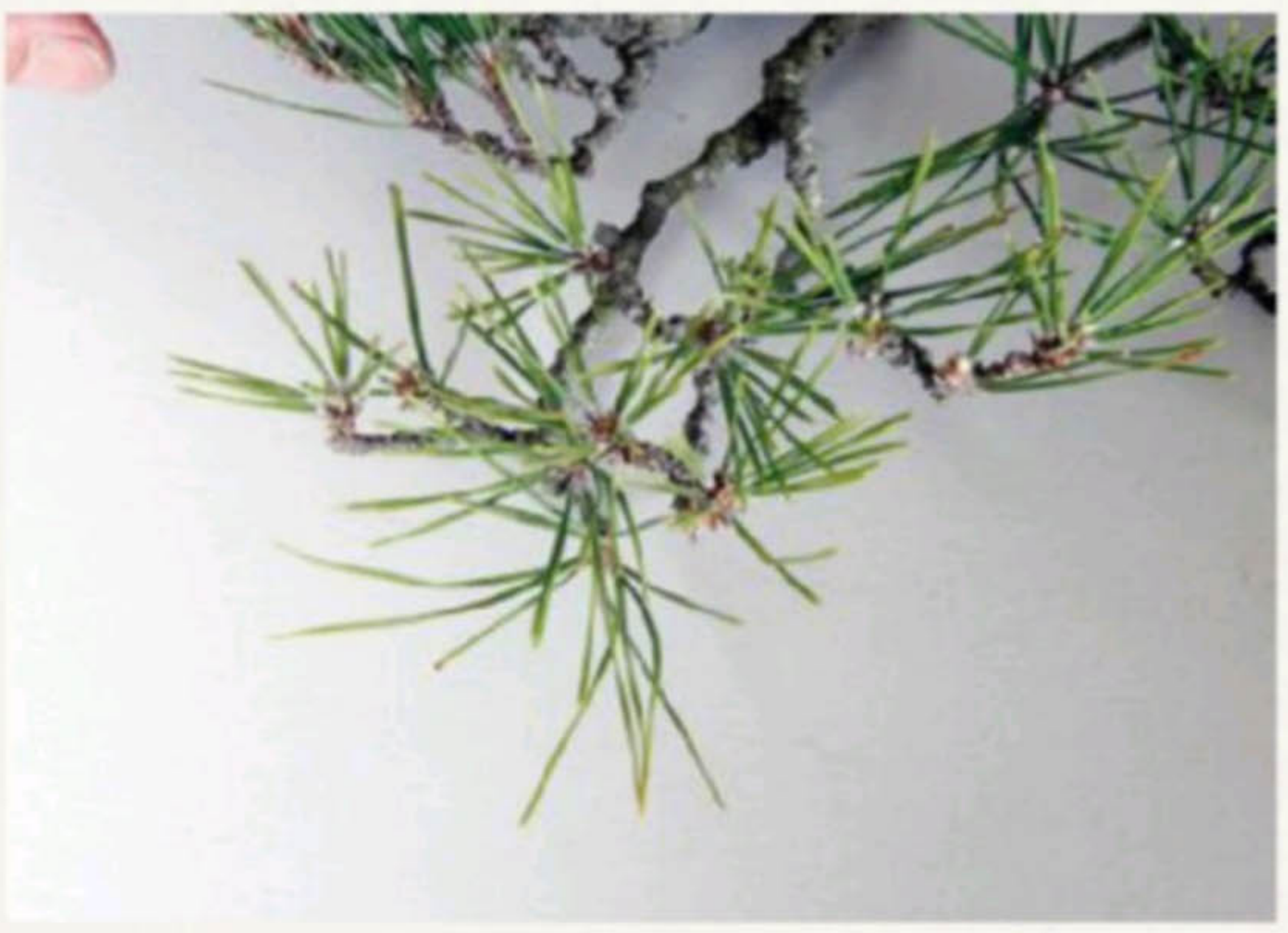
Work that can be done during candle cutting: Branch thinning

Small bud removal

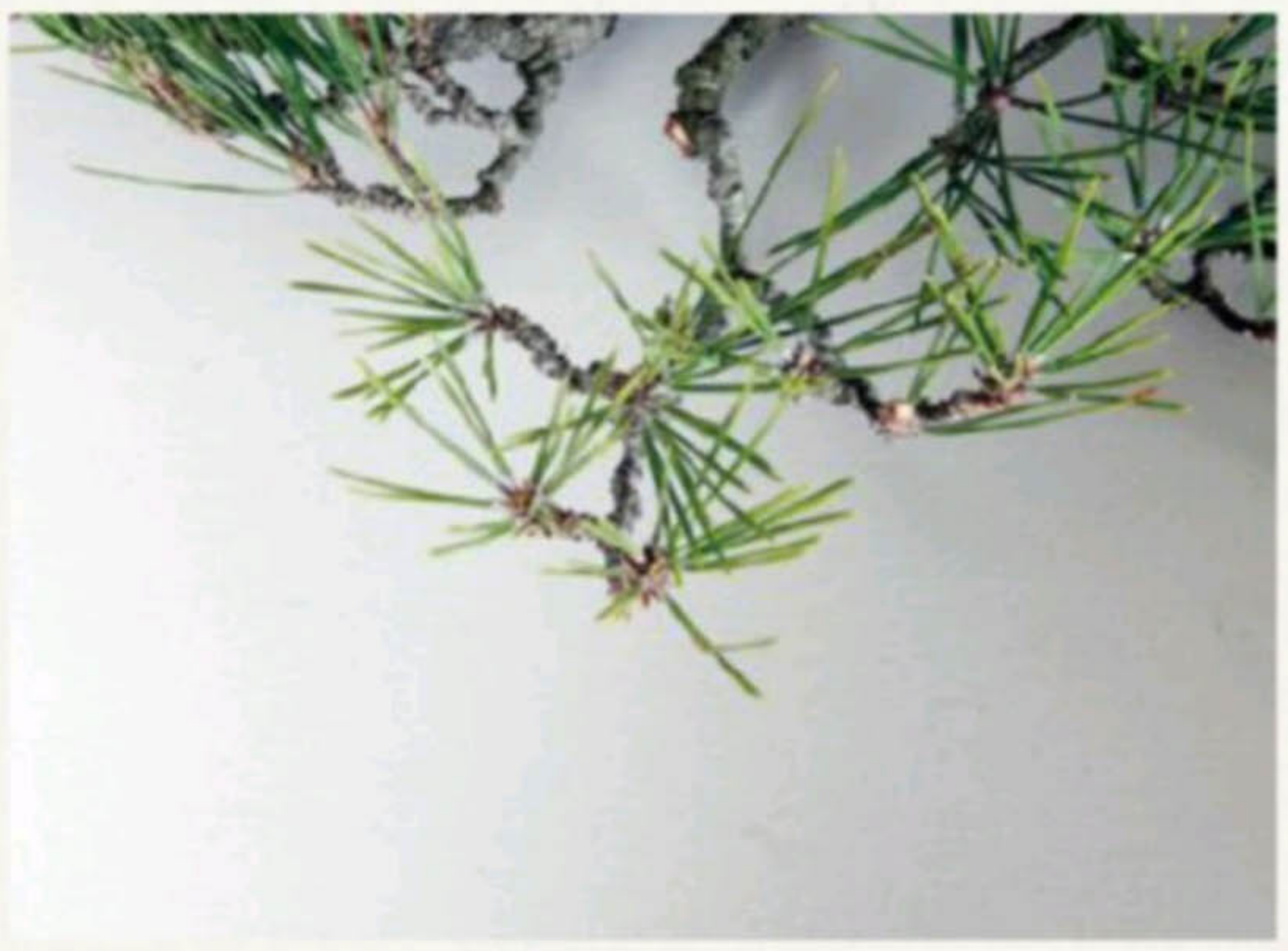
After candle cutting, if you look closely, you may find a small shoot remaining in the centre. If left as is, it will grow vigorously and cause overly long shoots. It is important not to overlook it and remove it. In this case, simply cutting wasn't enough, as the secondary buds at the tip would become too crowded. So, the thickest central shoot was also cut from the base



Balancing the strength of small branches through pruning

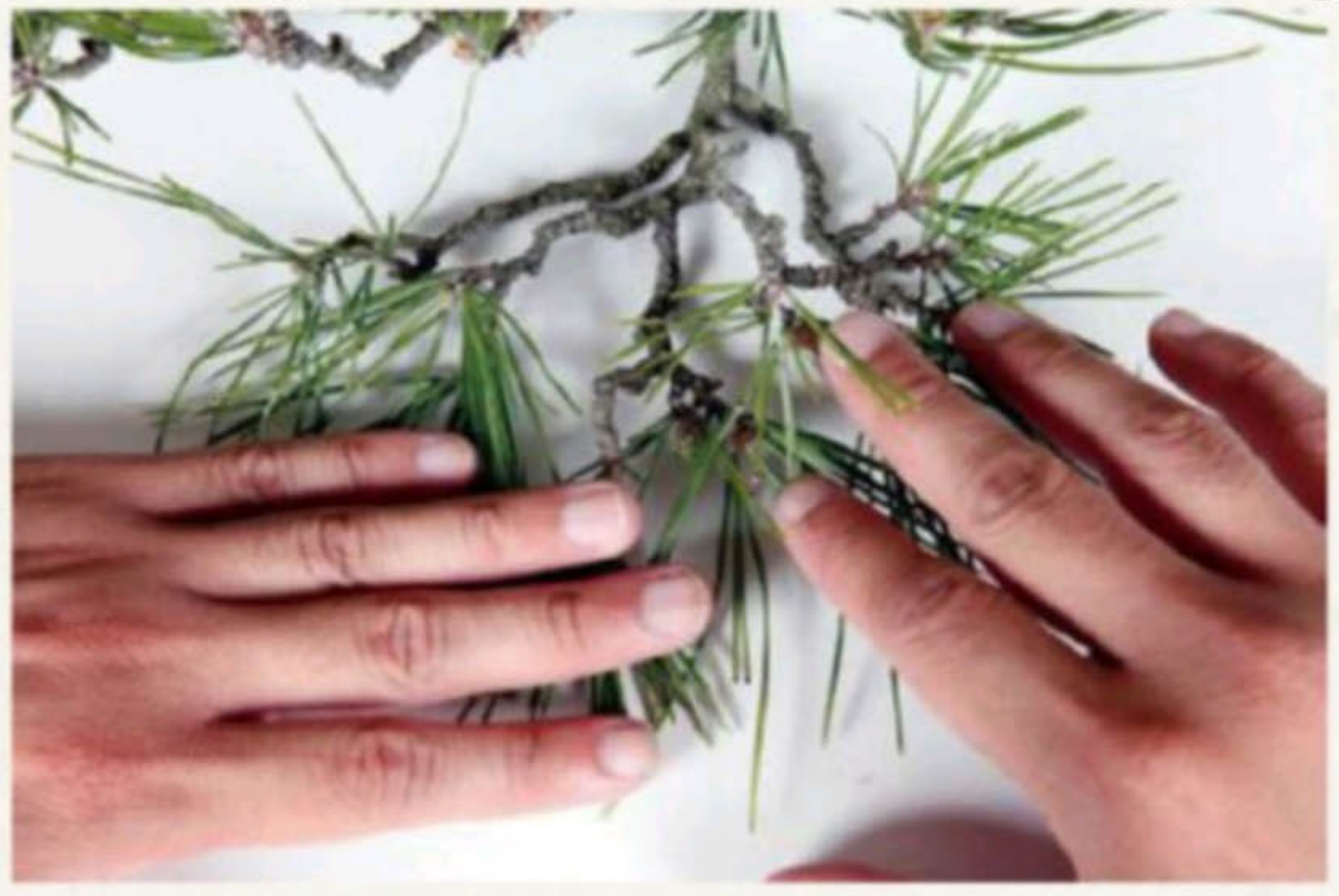


Lower branches that had only weak buds and were not trimmed during the first cut of the two-step method. The left side is stronger than the right, with a thick shoot extending downwards to the left

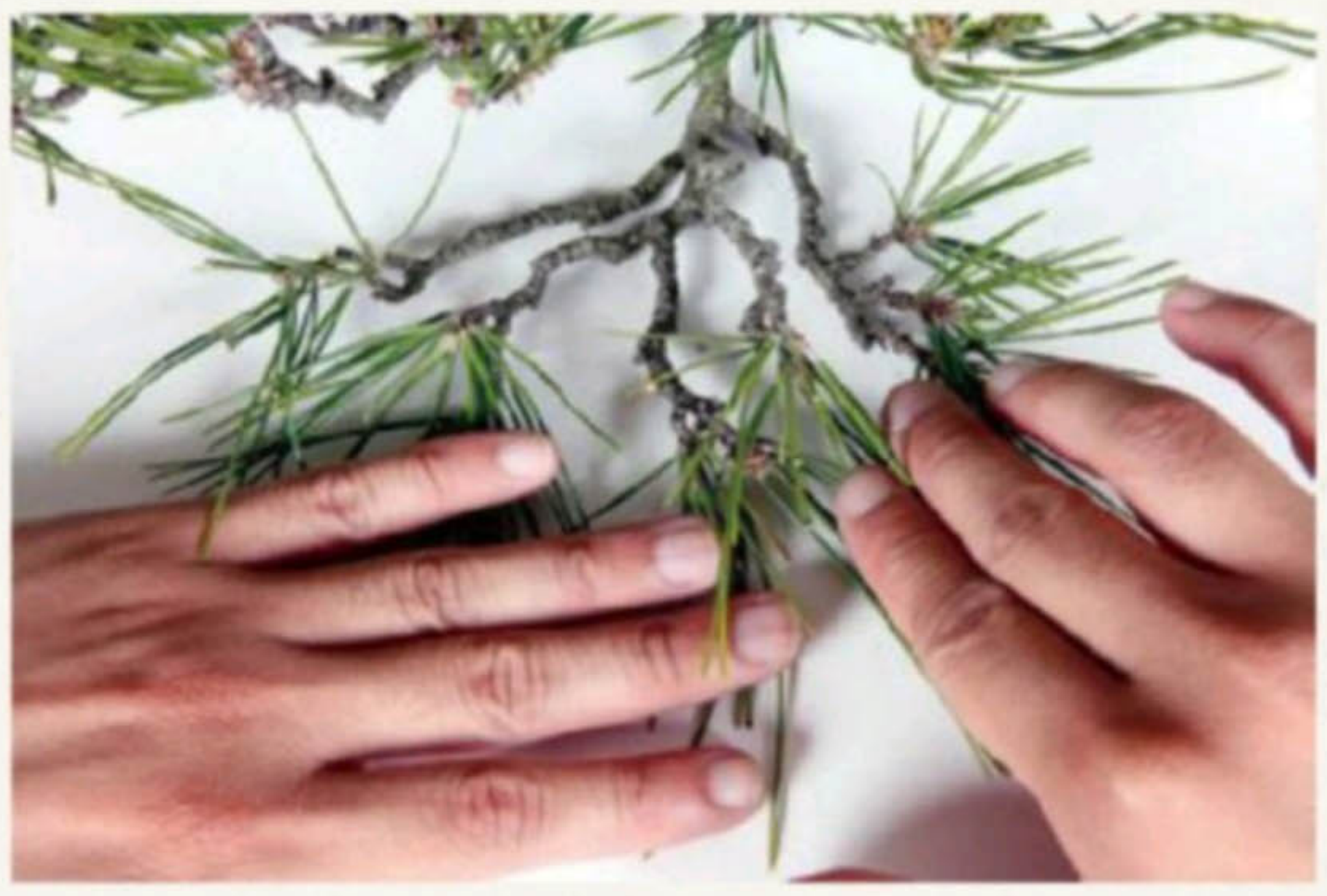


Since there were also branches above on the left, the left branch was cut back to the fork to avoid overcrowding. The finer branches at the tips were also thinned out to balance their strength and create a cleaner appearance

Pruning to eliminate overlapping branches



A section with multiple small branches. Although technically a fork, the branch tips overlap and look cluttered



After removing the overlapping branches, the branch forks are now clearly visible and clean up to the tips. This kind of thinning should be done not only during bud trimming, but also at any time it has become noticeable

Understanding bud vigour

Strong shoots have thick stems and will grow long, often with a high number of needles. Weak shoots grow less, have thinner stems, and fewer needles.

Even on a single tree, areas such as the apex, upper branches, and branch tips tend to produce stronger shoots. In contrast, the base of the branches, lower branches, and interior areas tend to have weaker shoots.

Shoot strength also varies depending on the stage of development. In the early stages of branch formation — on young or training trees — the differences between strong and weak areas are more pronounced. As the tree matures into a semi-finished or finished state, these differences become smaller. Naturally, younger trees show a greater range in shoot vigour, older trees less.

Additionally, even shoots of the same size can differ in strength depending on their location. For example, a small shoot on an upper branch is stronger than one on a lower branch. A shoot on a branch tip is stronger than one at the base, or in an inner area.

To improve your skill, it's important to carry out candle cutting understanding these differences in vigour.

Pruning – more essential than candle cutting alone

Some may believe that simply performing candle cutting is enough to grow a black pine — but this isn't entirely correct. Candle cutting helps to balance vigour at the tips and increase the number of fine branches with short internodes. However, this alone isn't enough for proper branch formation or maintenance. Even with candle cutting, differences in strength will naturally develop among the fine branches at the tips. Moreover, dense tip growth reduces light and airflow to the inner branches. No matter how short the internodes are kept, the overall branch volume increases year by year. As a result, the inner branches and shoots weaken.

Why pruning is so important to preserve inner adventitious buds

Why are inner buds so important? When you want to shorten and compact a branch that has grown outward, inner buds are what you rely on. If no buds remain, except at the tips, shortening a single branch will not encourage any adventitious back budding. To expect back budding, the whole tree would need to be heavily cut back — and even then, there's no guarantee it will sprout as desired. Unlike deciduous trees, black pines don't easily produce new buds from bare wood. Without inner buds, you'd need to resort to branch or bud grafting, which takes more time and effort. This is why it's so important to preserve inner buds as you build branches.

Branch thinning during candle cutting

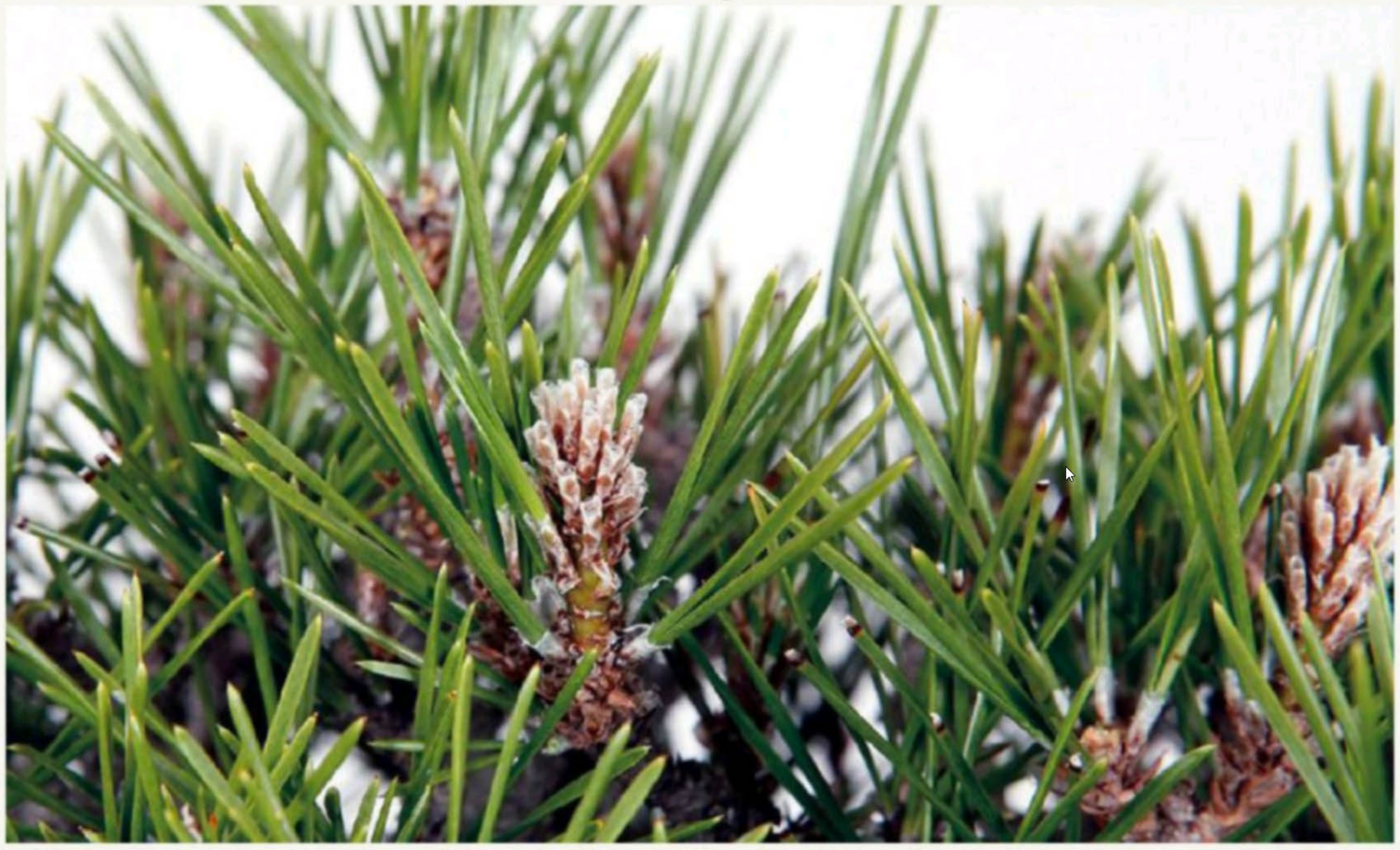
Once the candle cutting is complete, the interior of the tree becomes somewhat easier to inspect — a good opportunity to do some fine branch thinning, a key follow-up task. Branch thinning (pruning) is ideally done during dormancy. It can still be performed on fine shoots, or small branches at the tips, regardless of the season. When it comes to protecting the inner buds, earlier pruning is actually more effective.

Areas where three or four branches emerge from one point should be thinned to two. You may also need to prune leggy sections that have poor taper or flow, shorten branches that have overly long internodes, adjust branch junctions that are too close together, or remove the awkwardly angled upward or downward growing branches.

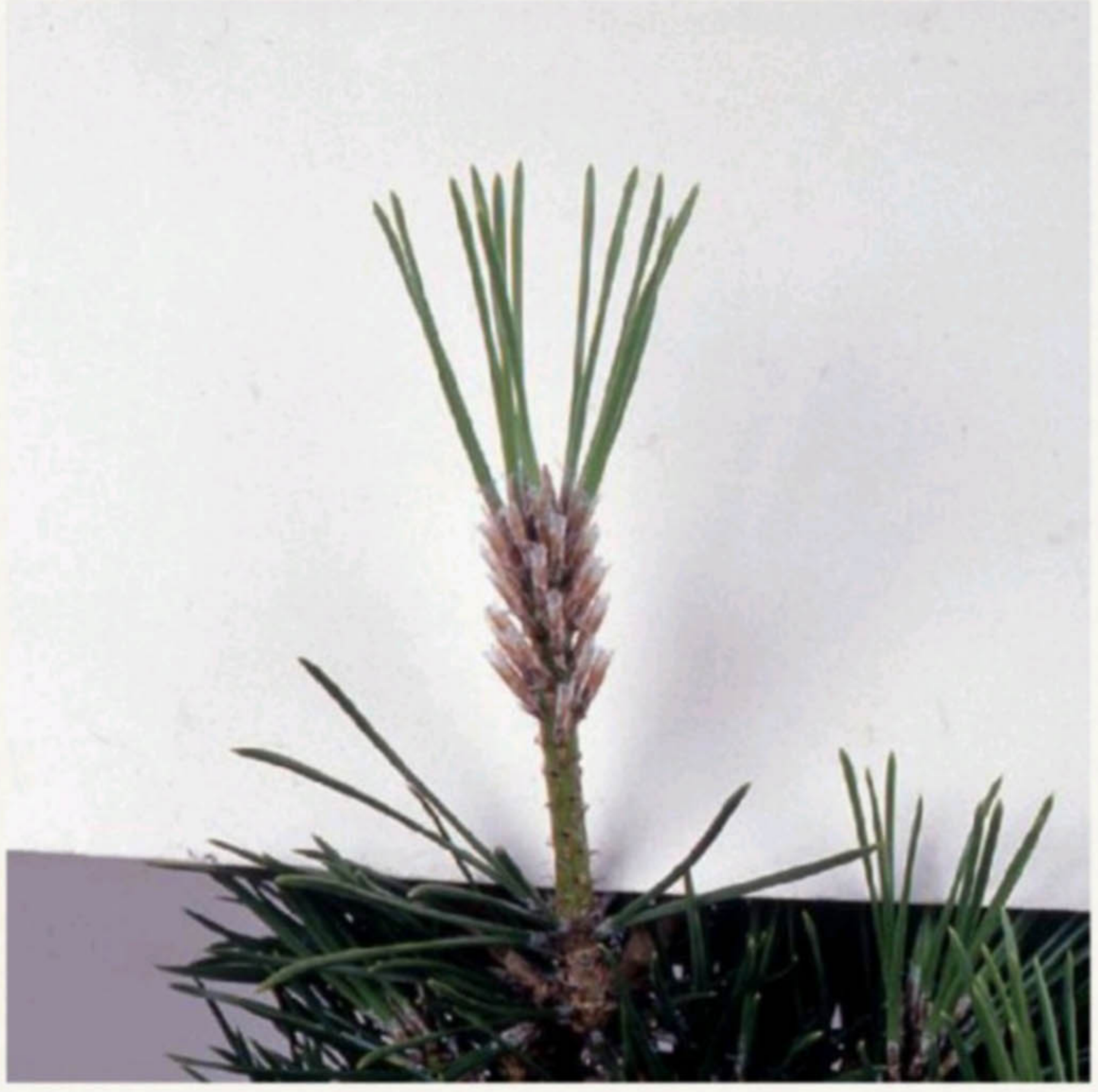
Note: In late spring, early summer, it's easy to damage buds or new needles if wiring, so it's best to hold off on shaping. Wait until the dormant season, after old needle removal, to carry out wiring and styling.

Tasks to perform during candle cutting: Needle thinning

Needle removal to suppress strong areas



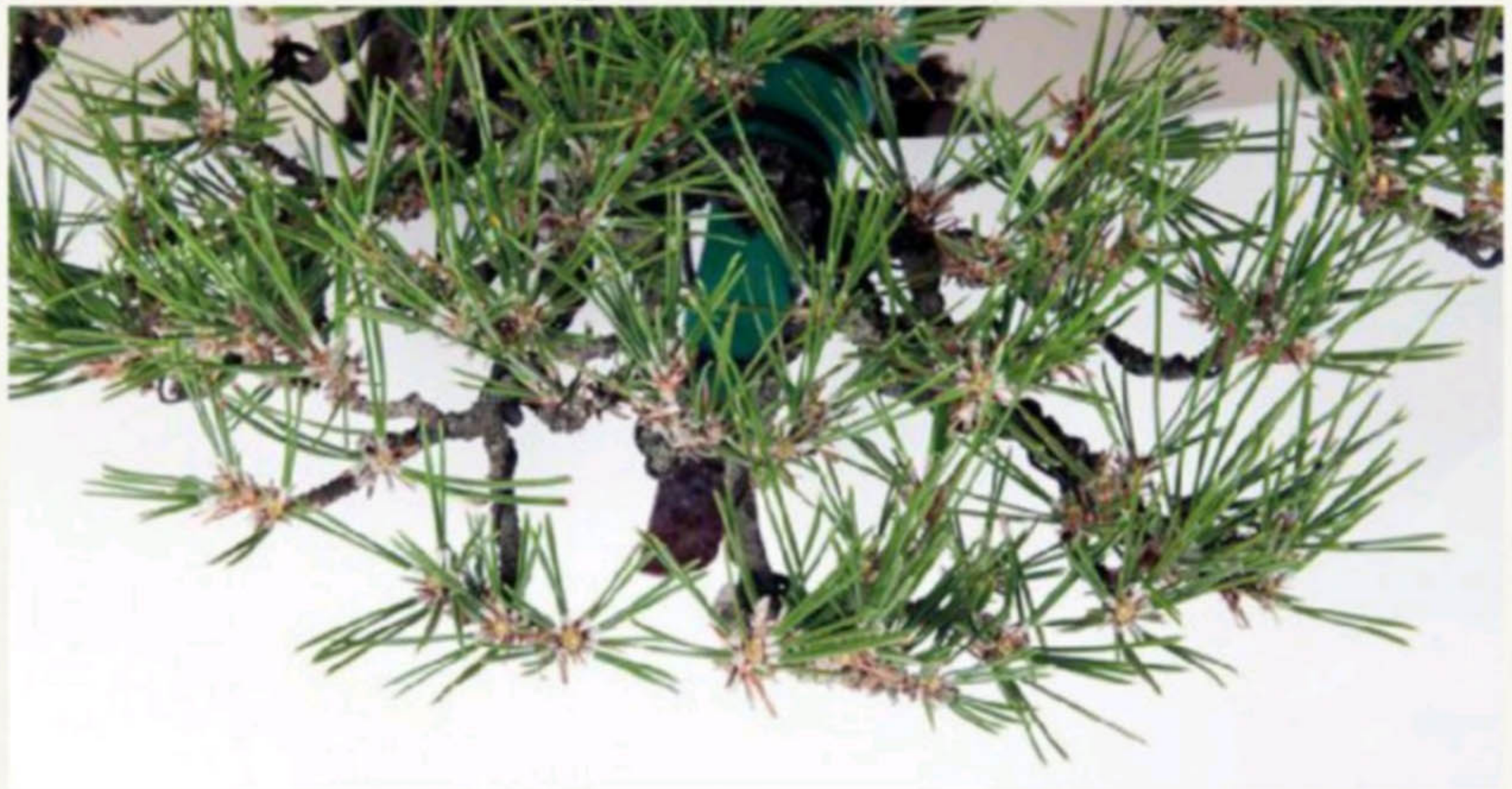
When trimming weak to medium-strength candles during the first cut of a two-step trimming process, new needles on the strong candles are removed to suppress their vigour. In the case shown, all the new needles have been removed. This causes the second buds to begin forming immediately, so the suppressive effect is somewhat reduced, but still much greater than doing nothing



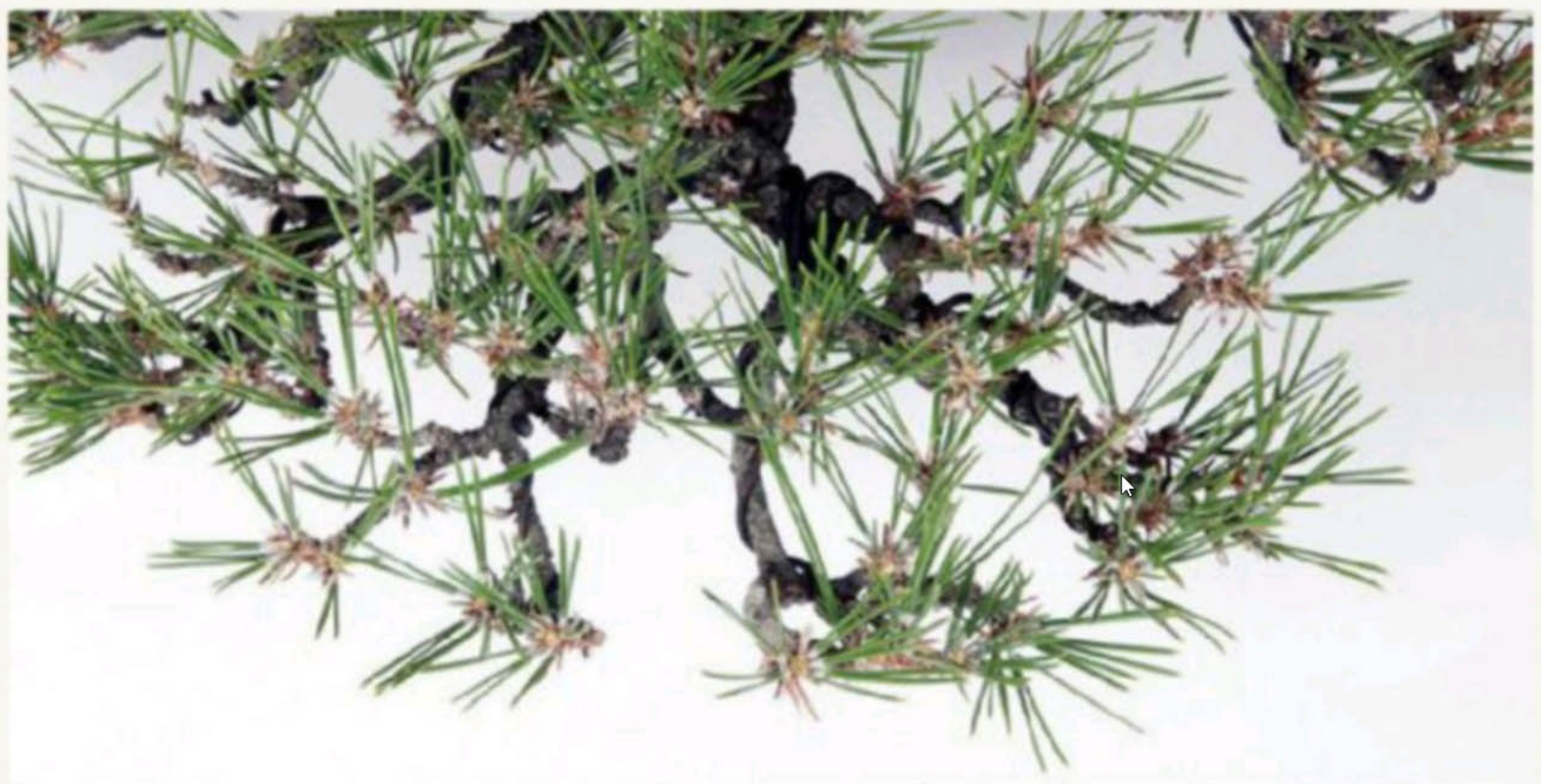
Another example of needle removal on a strong candle. Here, not all new needles have been removed — some have been left, which will delay the formation of the second buds maximising the suppressive effect. Since it can be a bit tedious, it's fine to apply this method only to particularly strong buds and use full removal on the rest

Needle thinning performed alongside candle cutting

After candle cutting

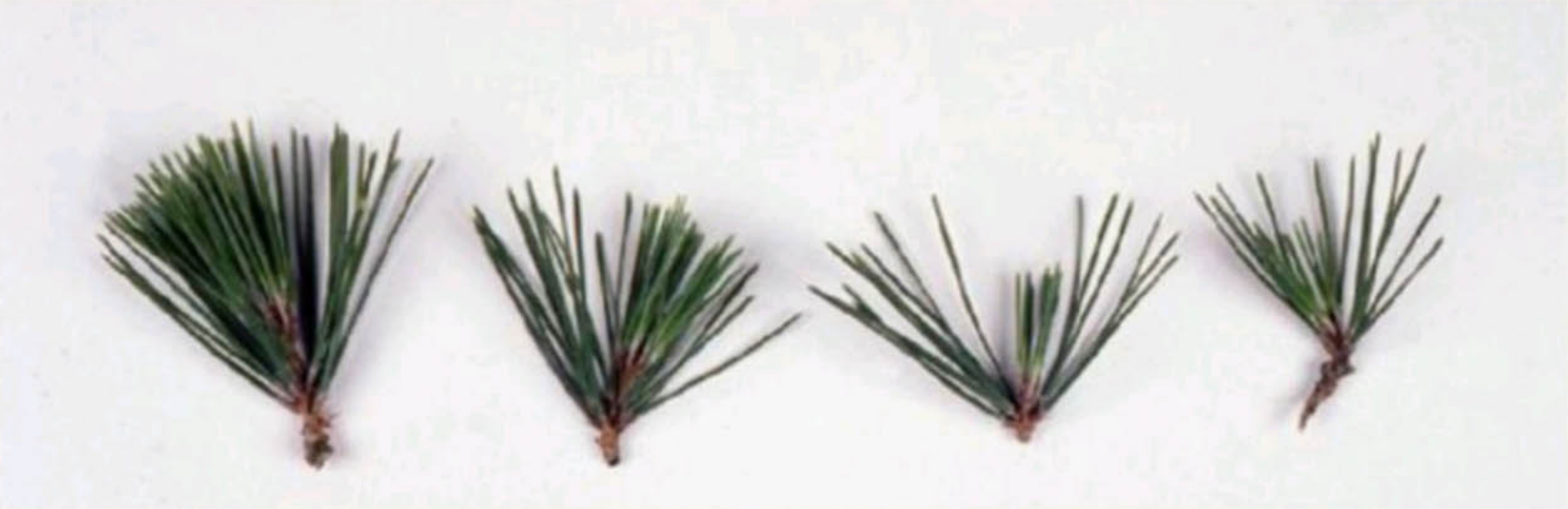


After needle reduction

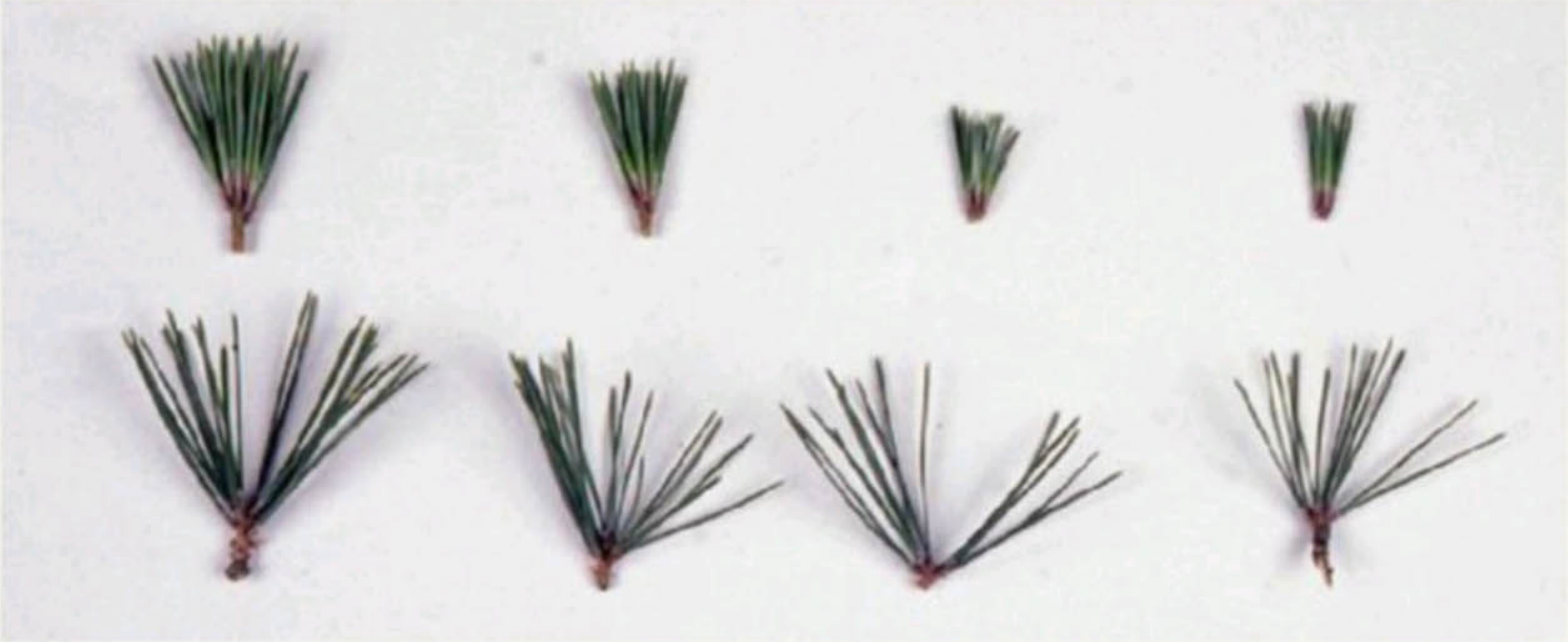


Whether doing single stage cutting or the second cut of a two-step trim, strong shoots tend to retain many old needles after candle cutting. By removing some of these old needles, their strength is reduced. Needle thinning not only helps balance second flush bud strength, but also improves sunlight and airflow within the branch structure, promoting the health and development of inner adventitious buds

Model case of old needle removal

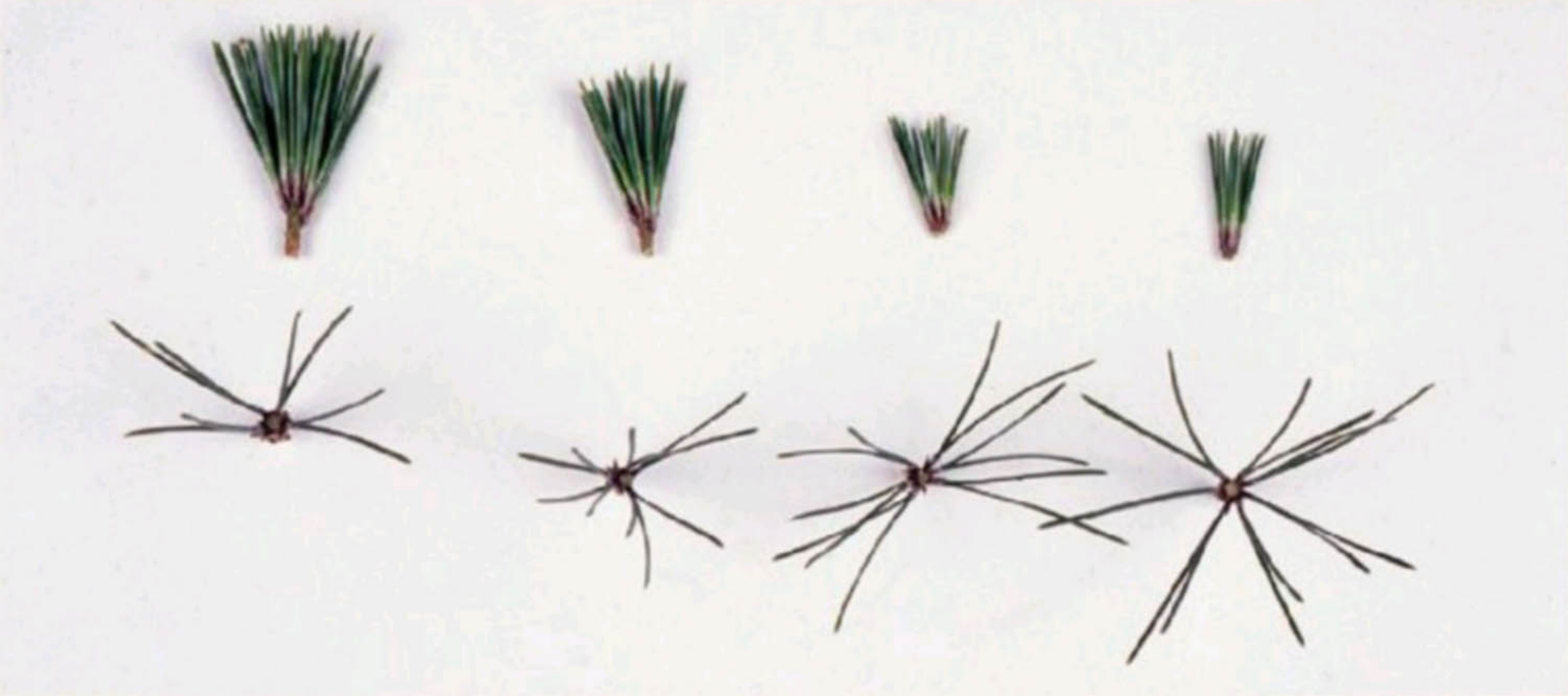


Before candle cutting



After candle cutting. The strong areas have lots of old needles

With stronger shoots you can remove more needles. However, with weaker shoots you cannot remove as many needles



To be continued

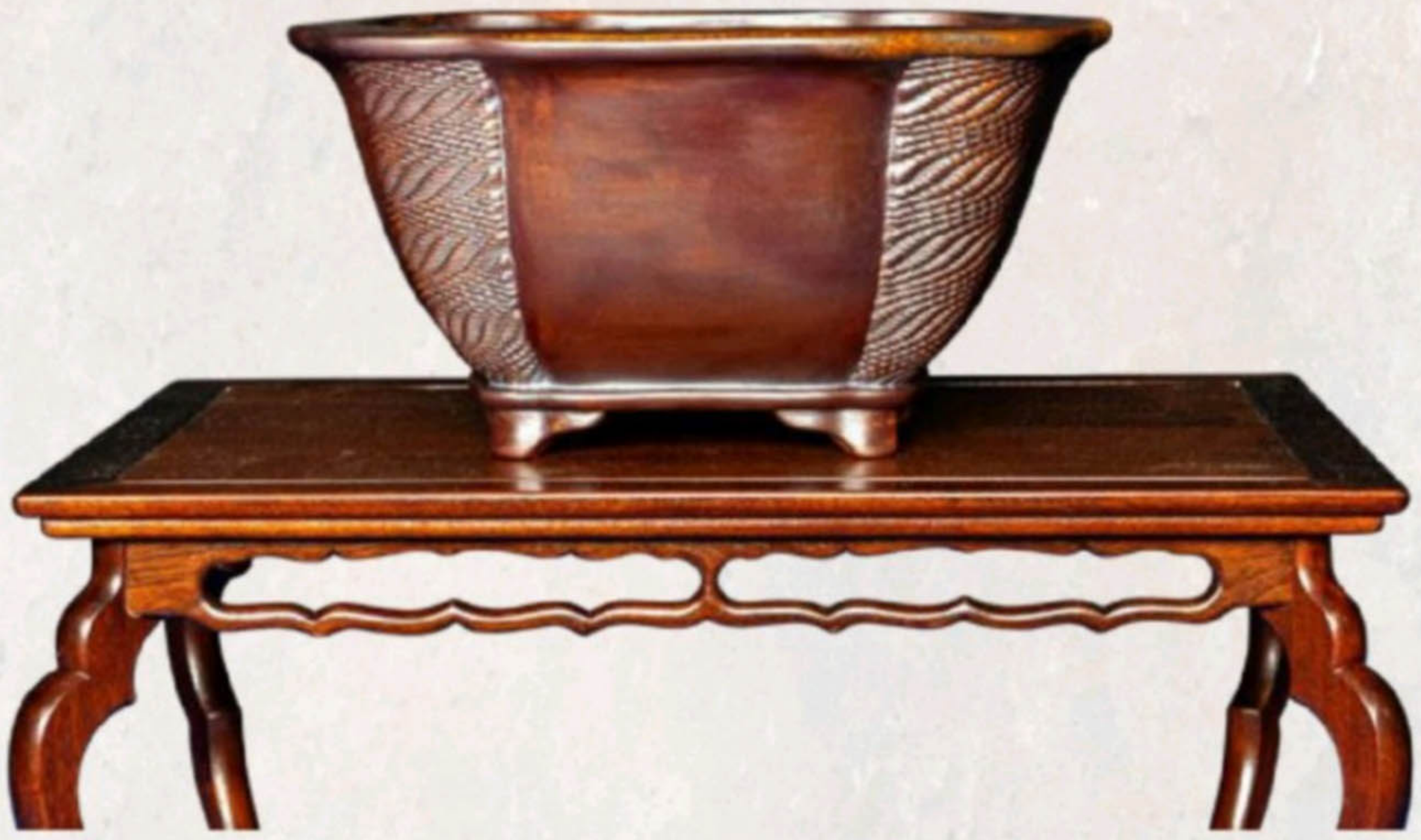
In the next issue you can learn more about dealing with long needles and bud thinning.

Taxus baccata
Alessandro Margutti

Elaeagnus pungens
Jurgen van Crombrugghe

Shohin: Ilex serrata
Chiyoko Tsujino

Photos:Bonsai Focus Studio



Pot
Igor Carino

Hylotelephium sieboldii.
Kunio Kanazawa

Shohin
Alexandre Escudero

Yamadori, I presume?

Nobuyuki Hirose creates a shohin juniper

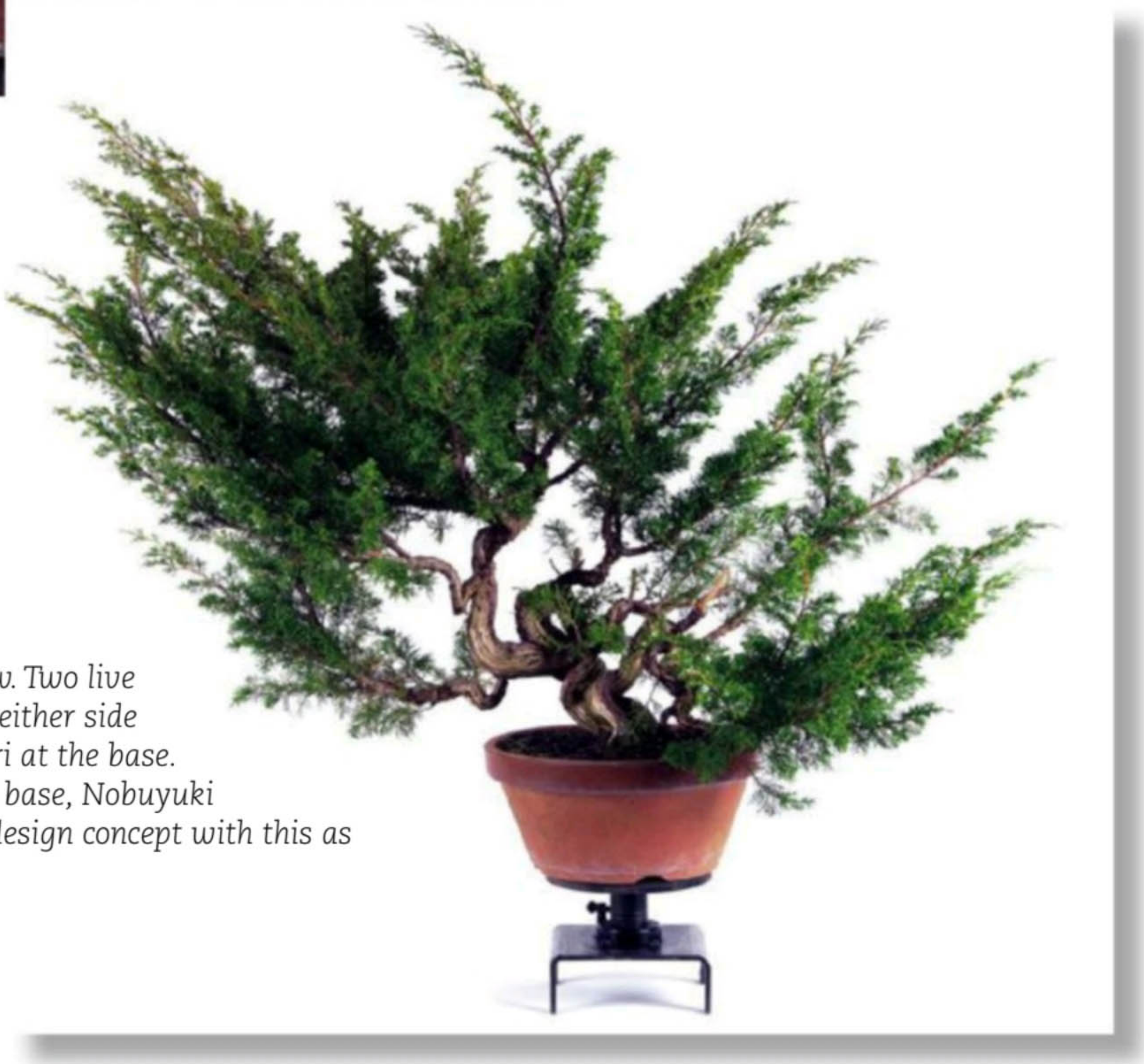
Text and photography: Kinbon, Japan

Turning a common juniper into an outstanding bonsai by changing it into a yamadori? Would that be possible?

Juniper before work. Height: 87 cm. Width: 95 cm

Nobuyuki Hirose

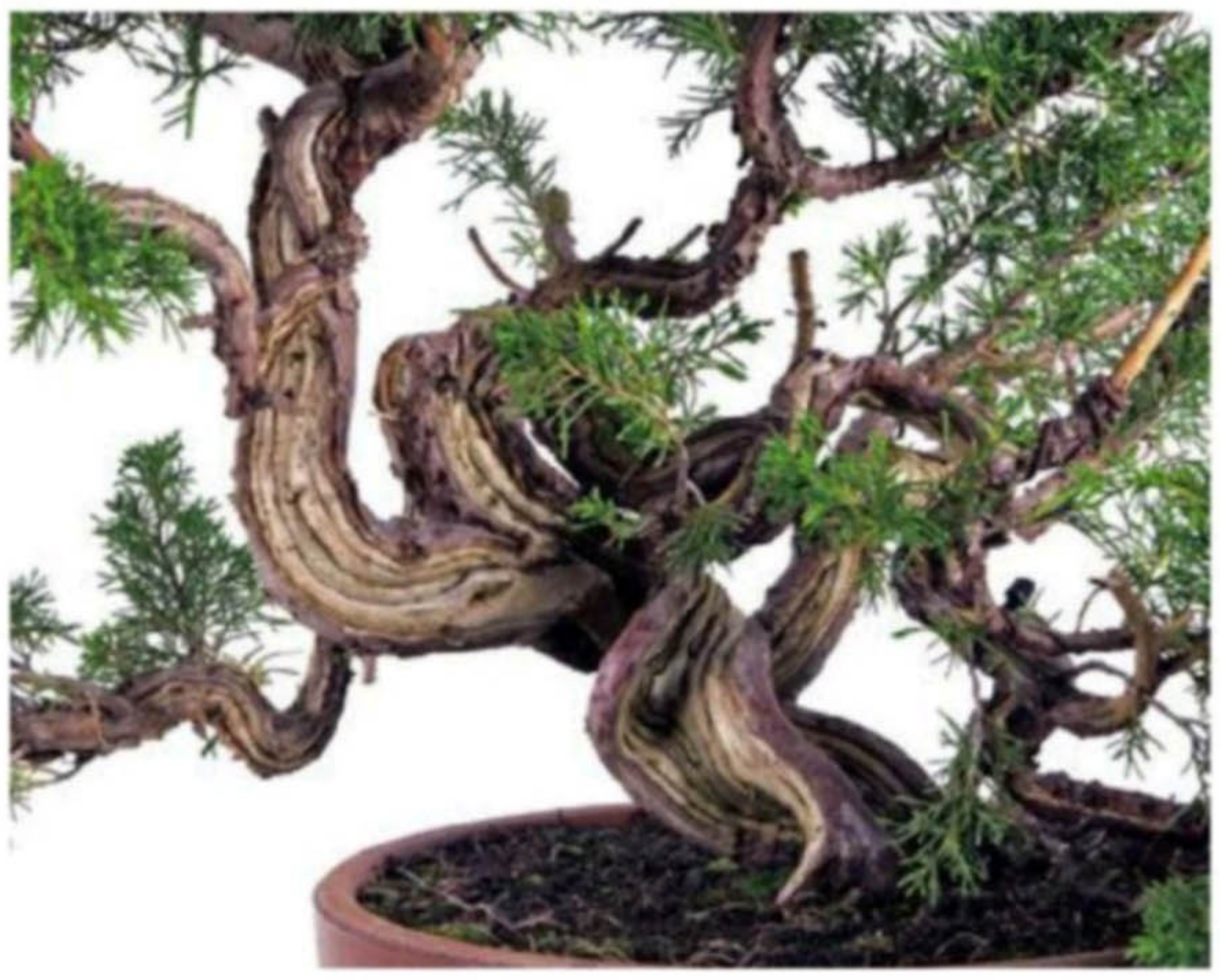
The mystery of life and death coexisting alongside each other, the rare and beautiful form, and its prominent role in our shohin displays have made the shohin shimpaku a very popular bonsai. With collected yamadori material now hard to come by, how are such masterpiece trees created? We follow rising artist, Nobuyuki Hirose, as he refines a top-quality specimen from available highest-class juniper material, crafted by a Master.



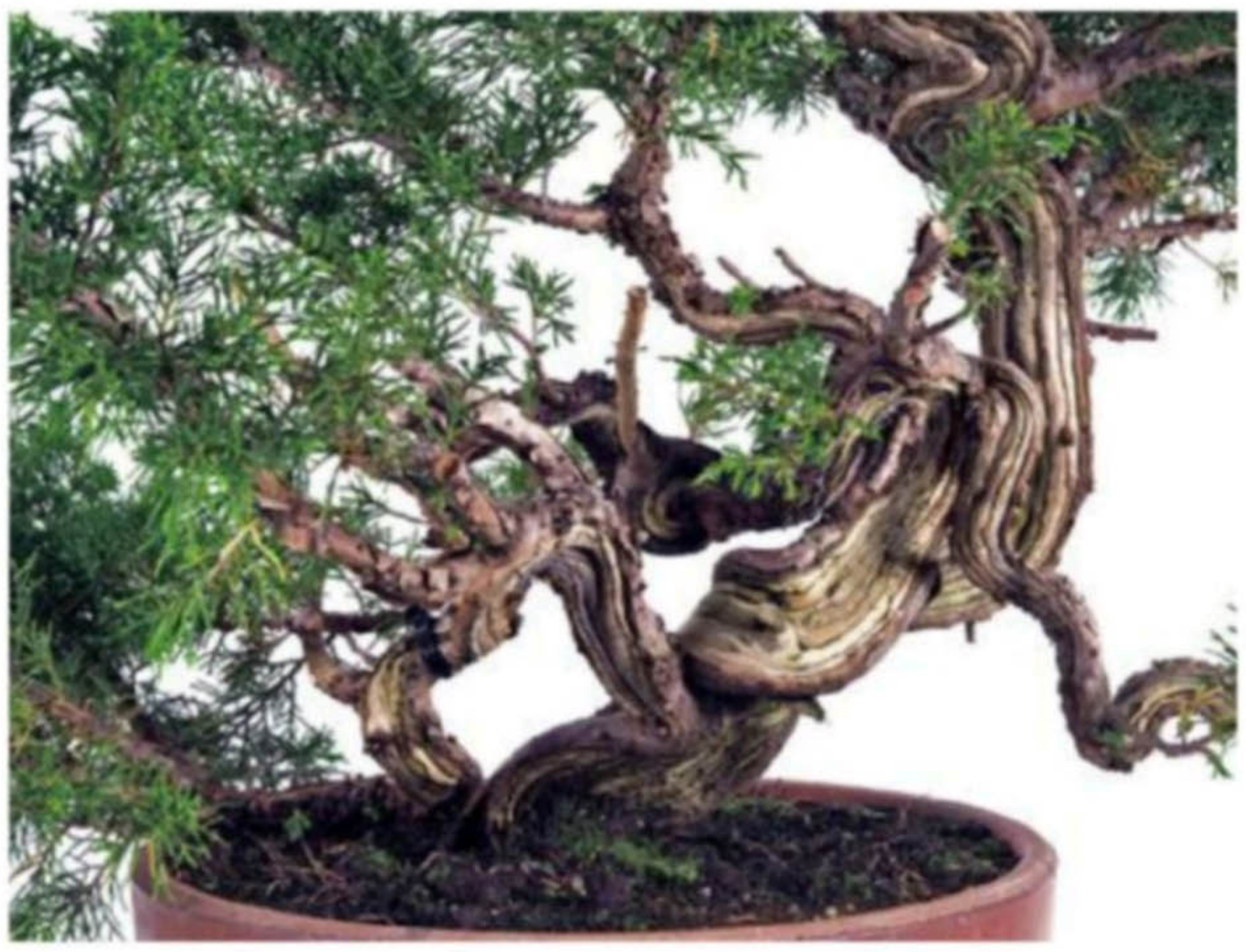
Provisional front view. Two live veins can be seen on either side of the board-like shari at the base. Prioritising the tree's base, Nobuyuki Hirose has built his design concept with this as the likely front

Material grown from a cutting by human hand

This juniper material was created by a Master from the Shinshu region. Though it is a specimen grown from a cutting, with compact foliage suitable for shohin bonsai, it is not simply a tree thickened in a field with some shari carved in. Through repeated meticulous carving and precise cultivation, the tree possesses incredible characteristics not found in other juniper raw material. Such as the board-like shari similar to that seen in wild trees and intricate movement extending from the trunk base to the tips of the branches. Around 30 to 40 years ago, this type began circulating in the shohin bonsai world, producing numerous masterpieces and award-winning works.



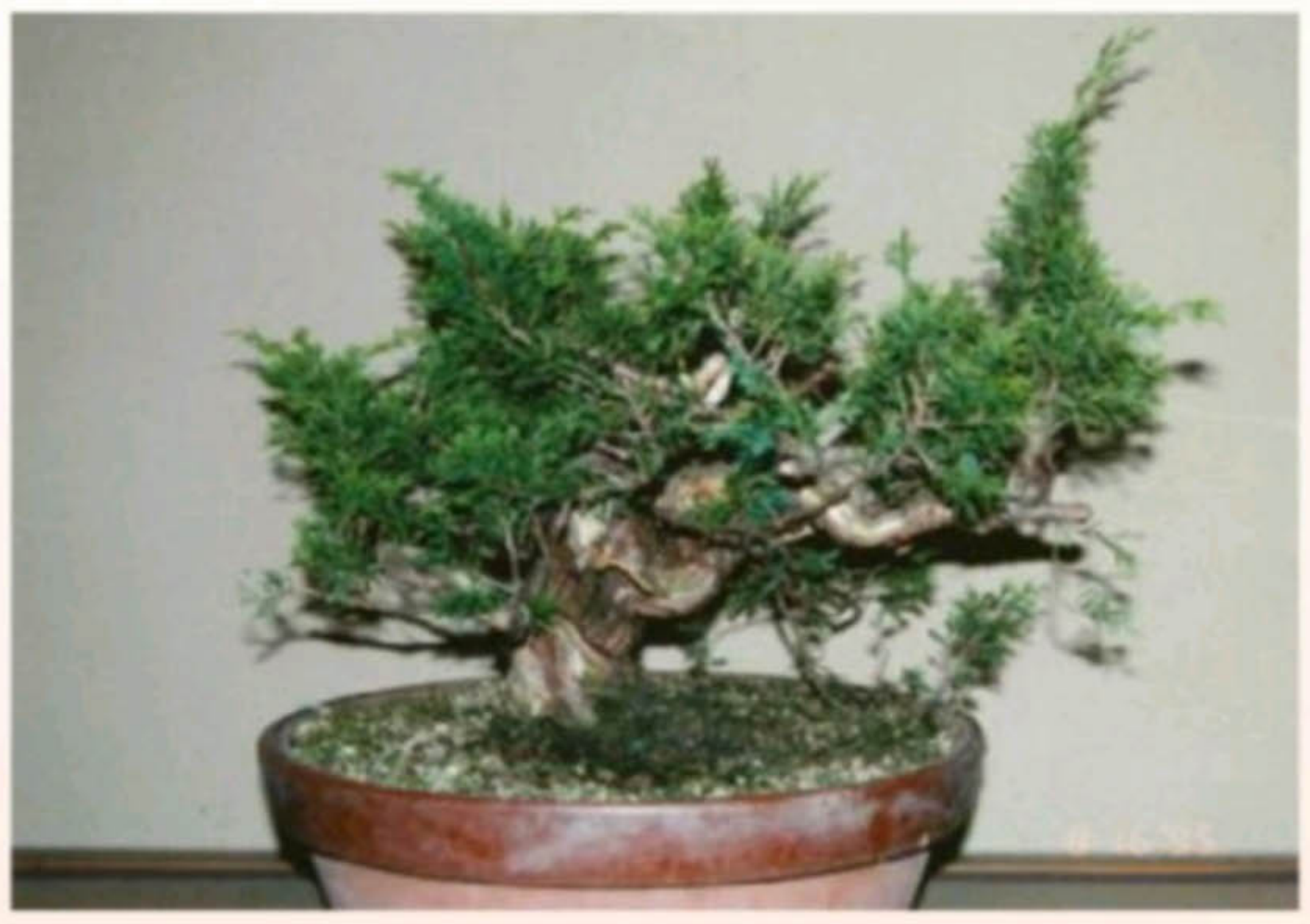
At the middle of the large spread of foliage lies a trunk rich in texture and deadwood features. How will this exceptional material be refined?



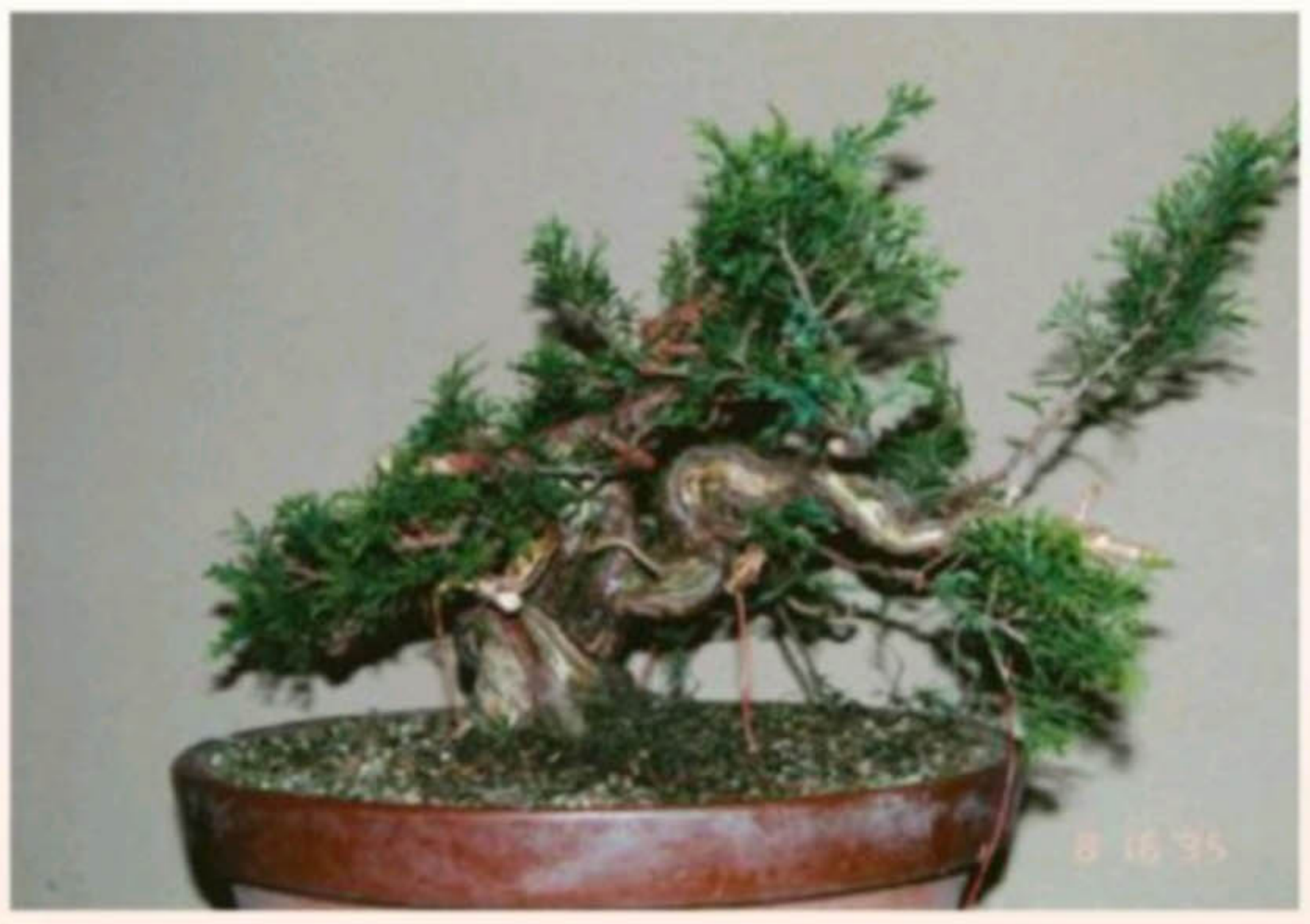
The provisional back. While the shari in the middle section is impressive, the base appears weak, and the relationship between the live veins and shari is inferior compared with the provisional front

> *I want to create yamadori-style trees in shohin size*

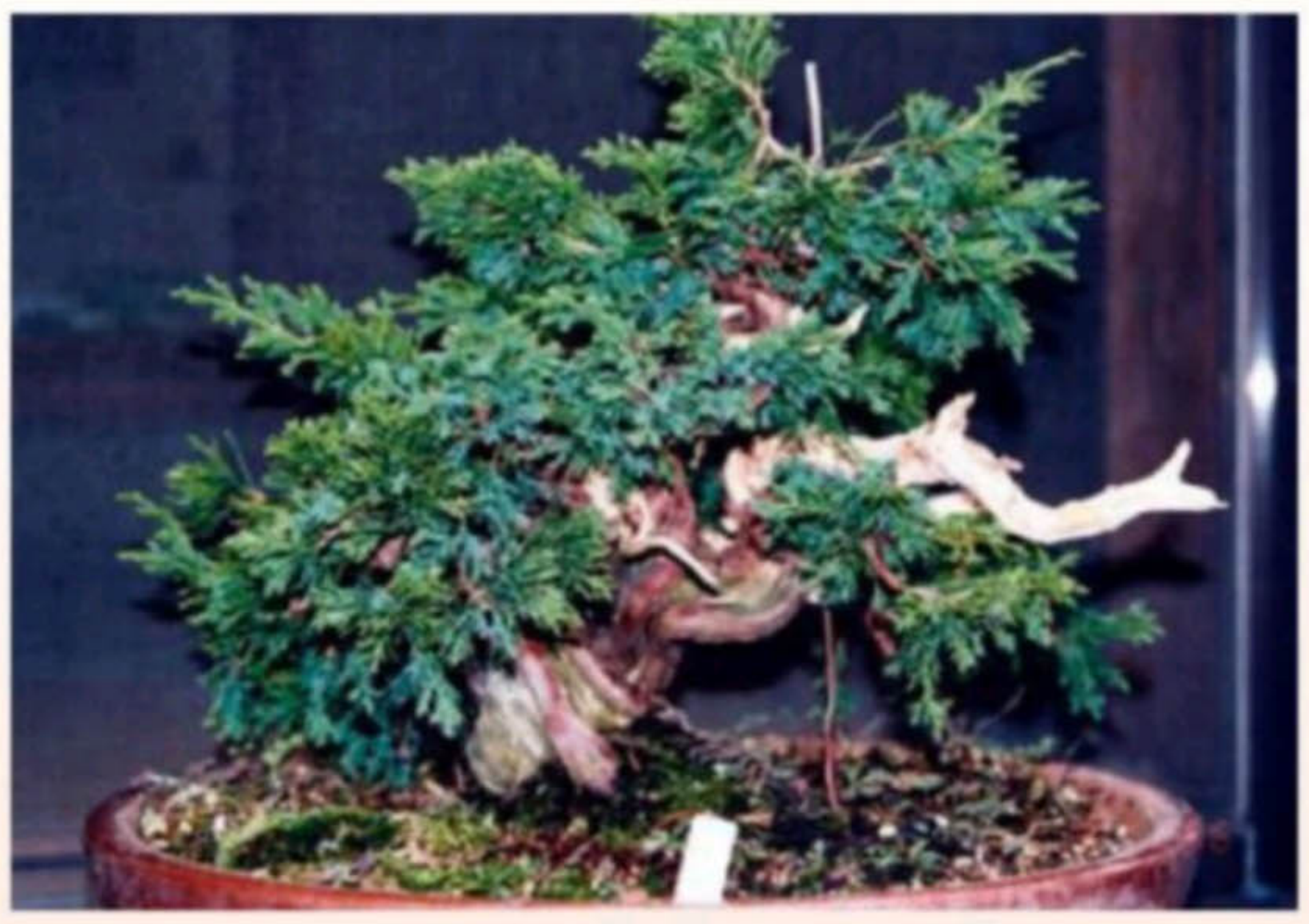
The path of material from the same lineage to winning the Kokufu Prize



August 1995, before work

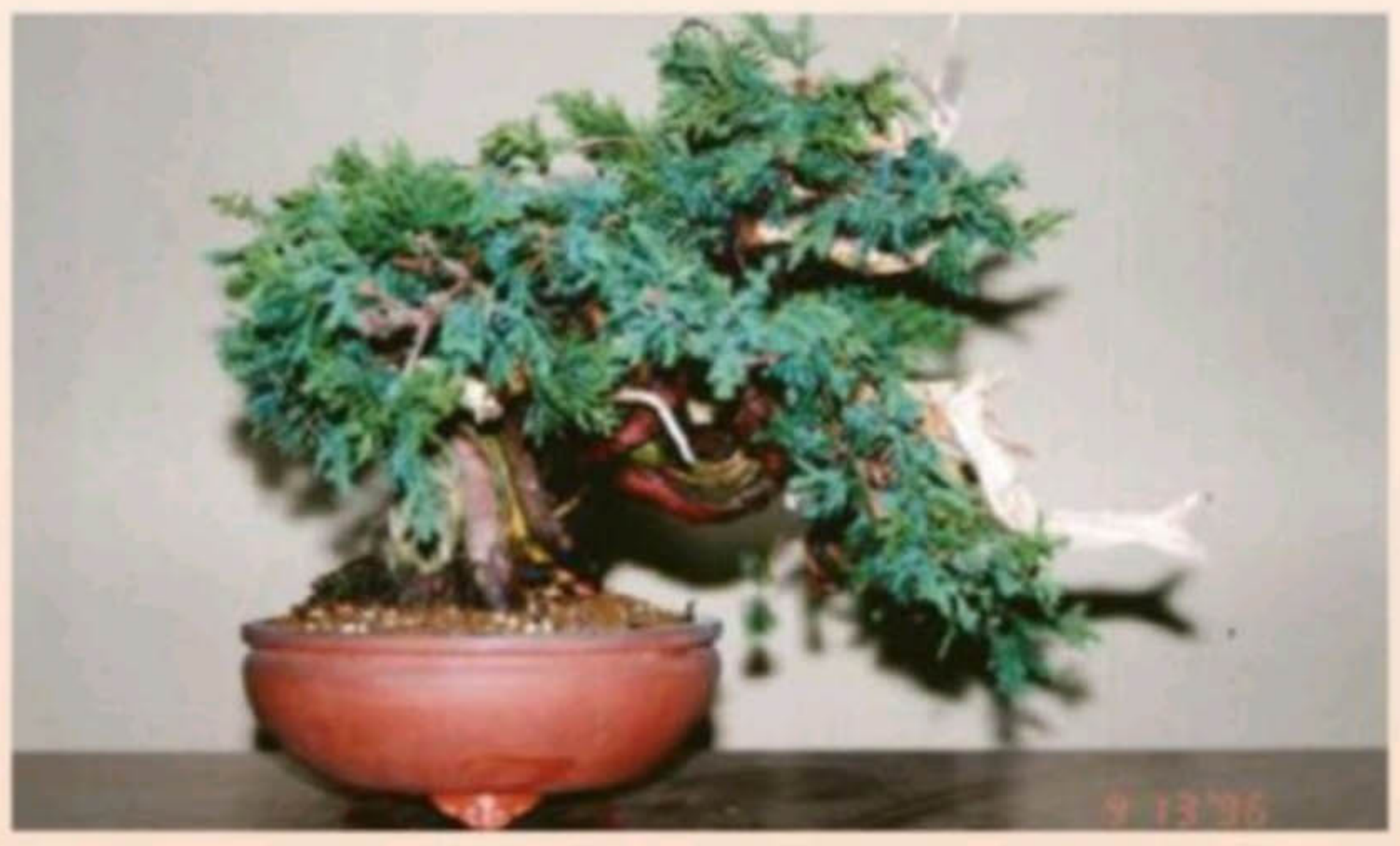


Same day after initial styling

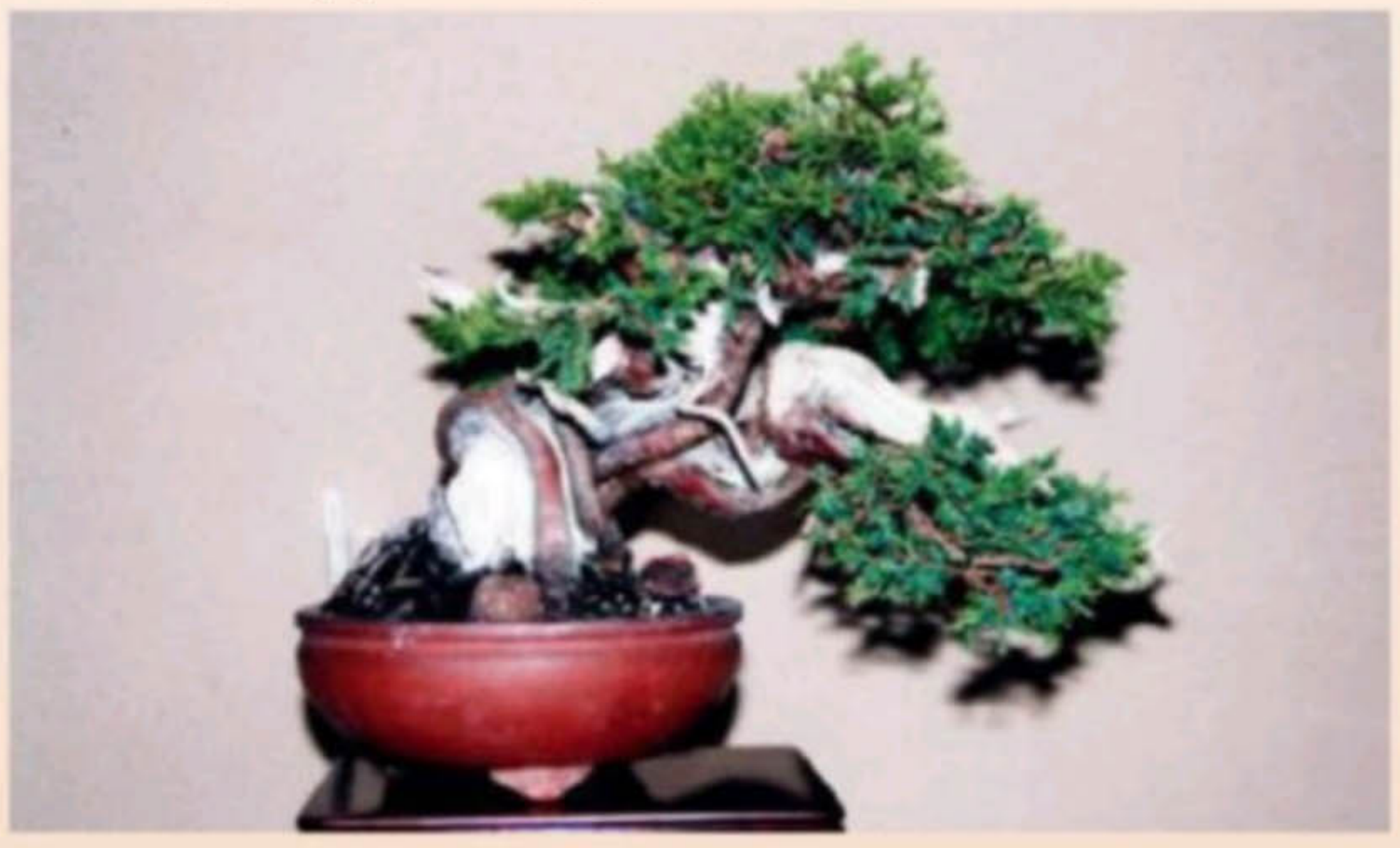


The tree in February 1996. The right-side jins have been carved

September 1996. The final image is starting to become clearer



In 1997 more styling work was performed and there is hardly any juvenile growth



In February 2001, it was displayed at the 75th Kokufu exhibition where it was the main tree in an award-winning three-tree display

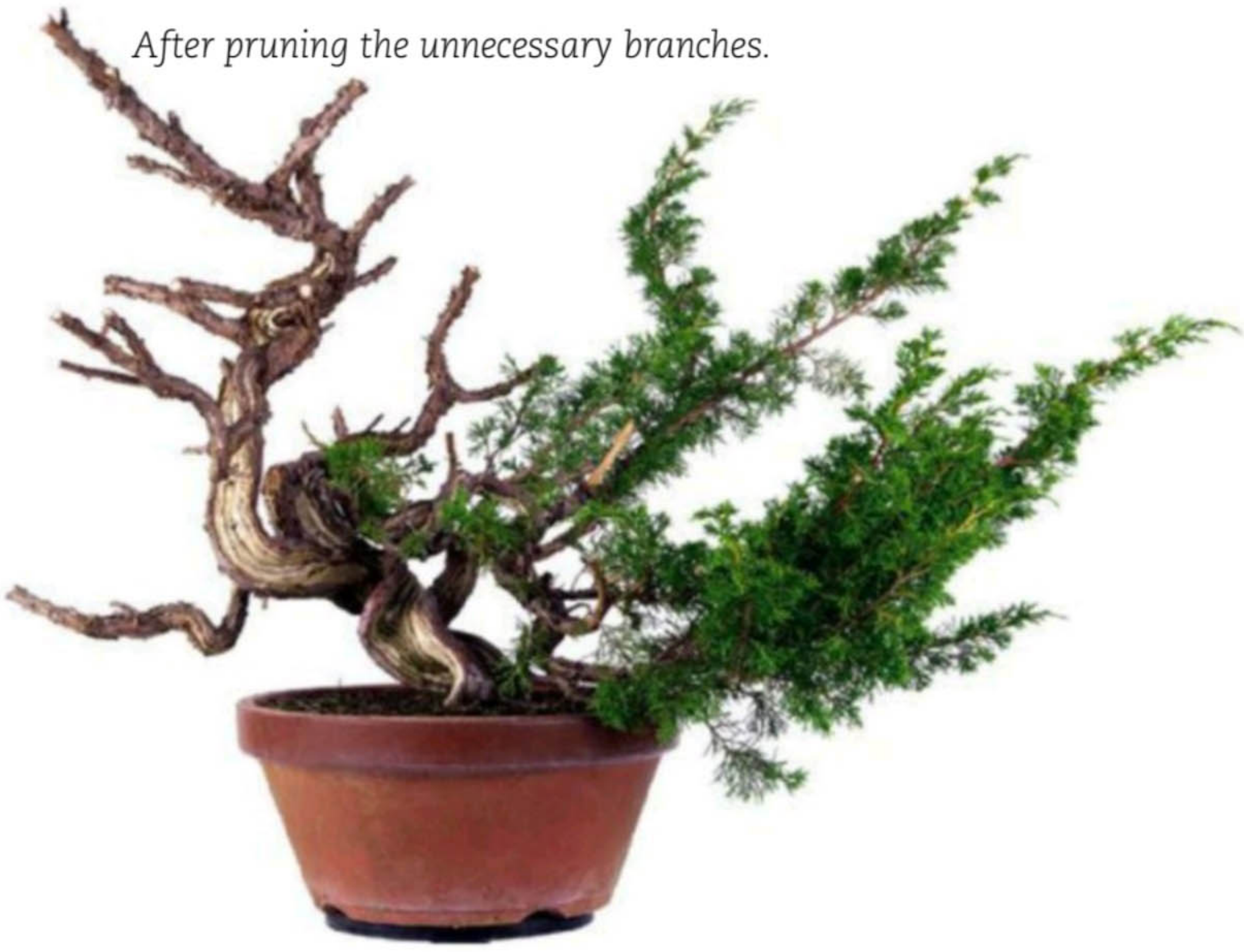
In December 2002 it appeared at the 11th Yuuga Shohin Bonsai Registration

January 2015, as displayed at the 40th Gafu-ten exhibition

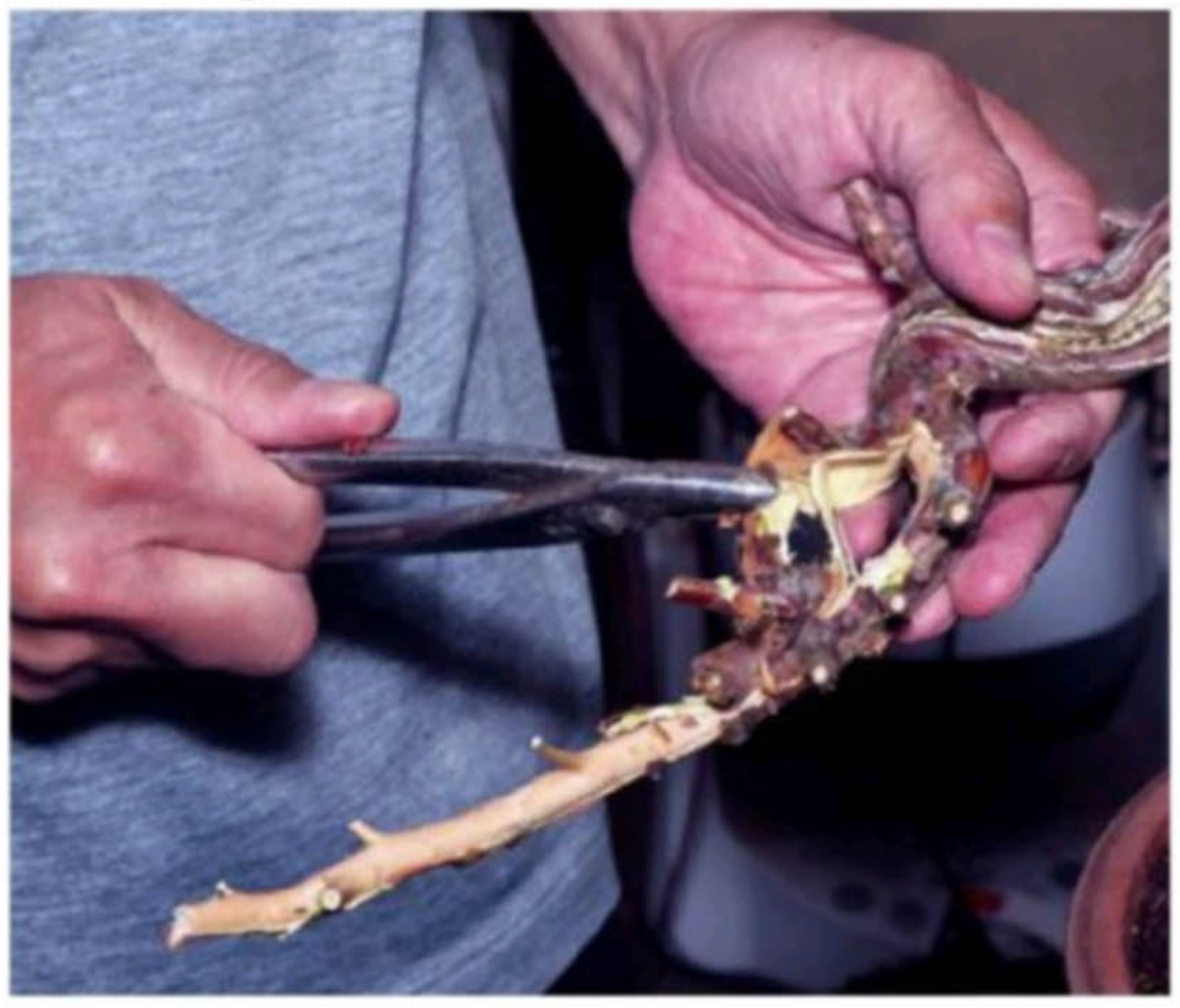
First, remove all foliage and branches from the left half

Nobuyuki Hirose decided to use only a small portion of branches from the apex to the right side, deeming the entire left half unnecessary. However, since those branches might be re-purposed as jin or shari, he did not cut them off at the base entirely. Instead, he began by removing all the smaller twigs

After pruning the unnecessary branches.

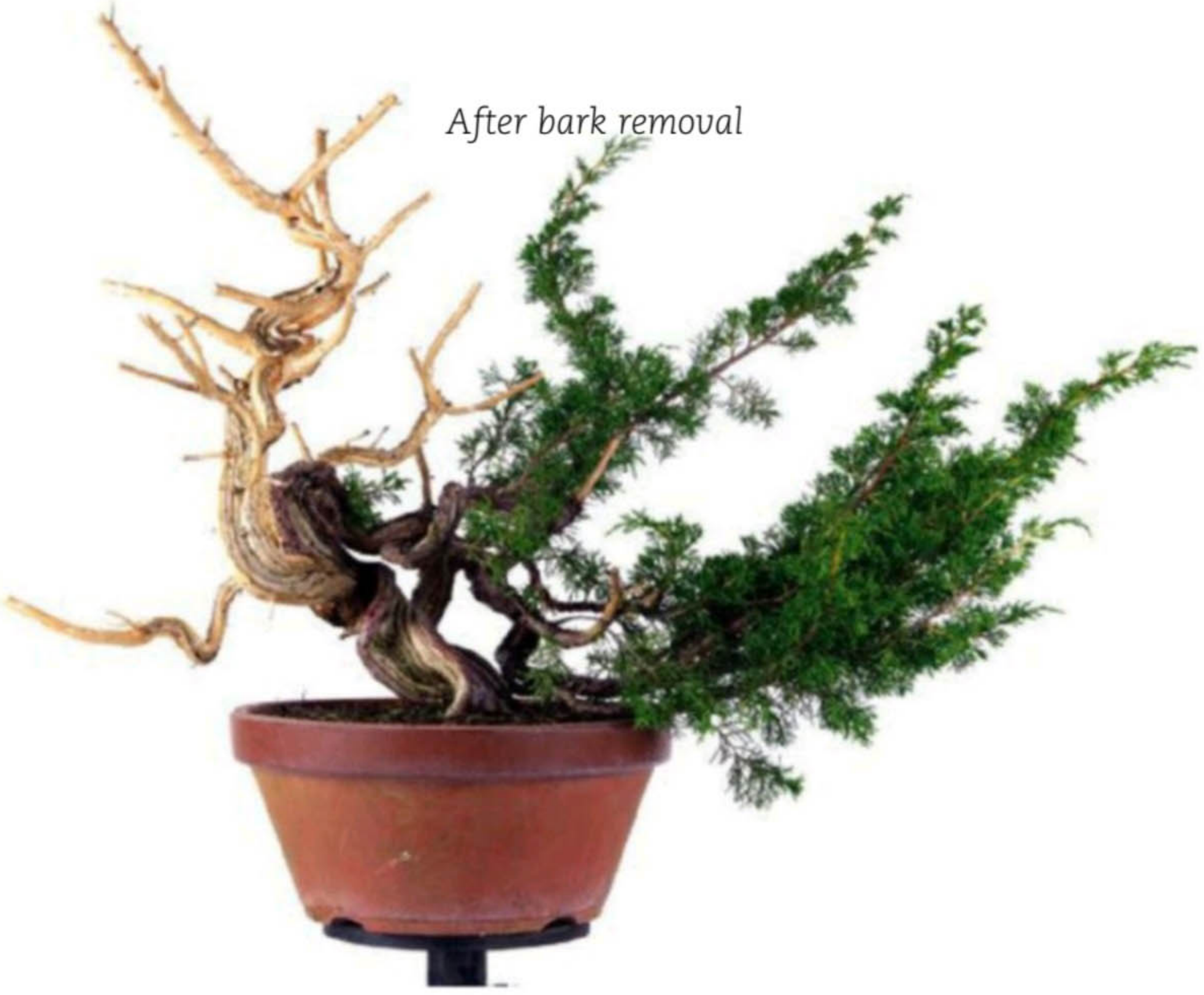


Peeling the bark to prepare for creating jin and shari

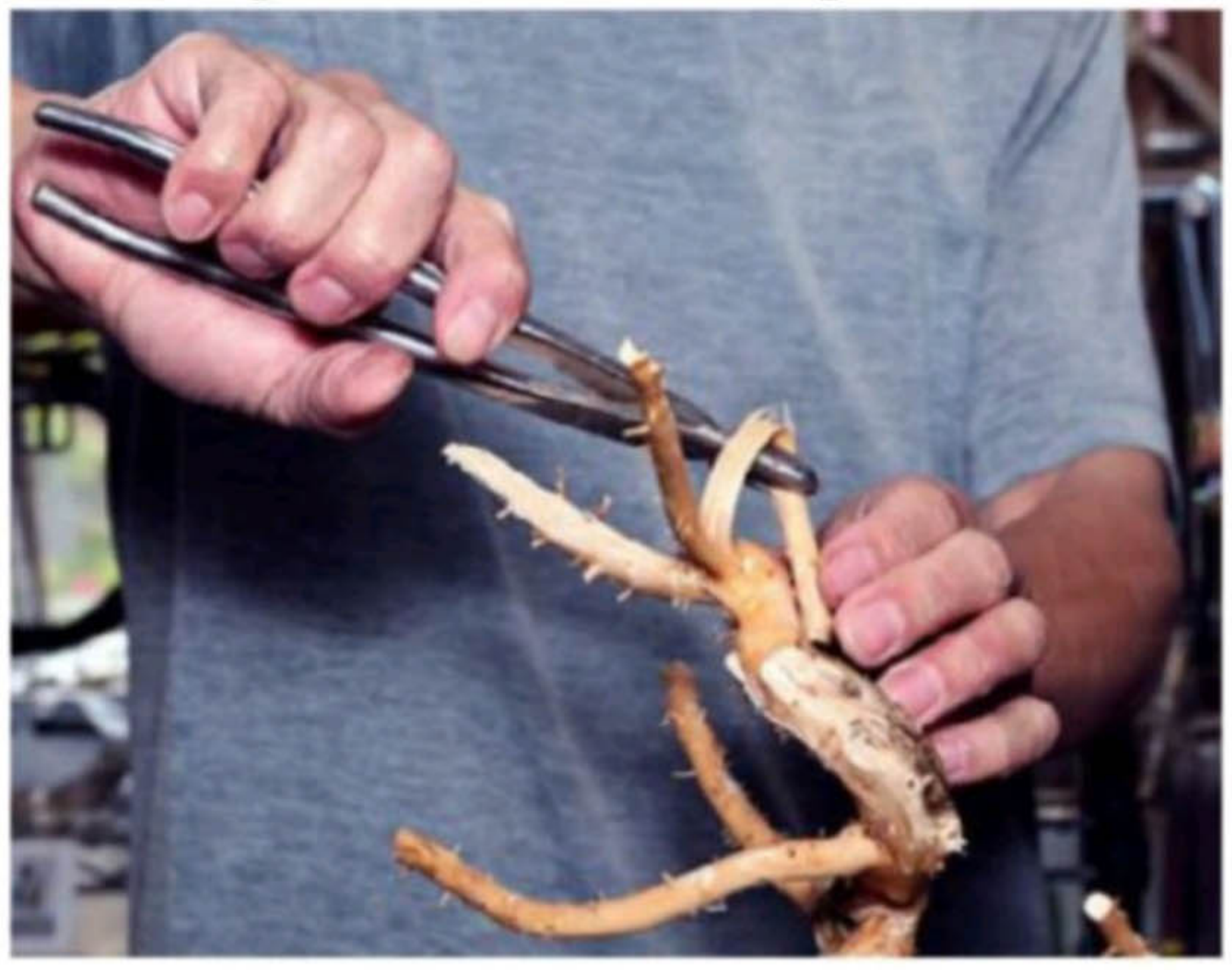


By crushing remaining branch and twisting it with pliers, the bark can be peeled off. During the growing season, especially June, when water flow is high, the bark comes off very easily

After bark removal

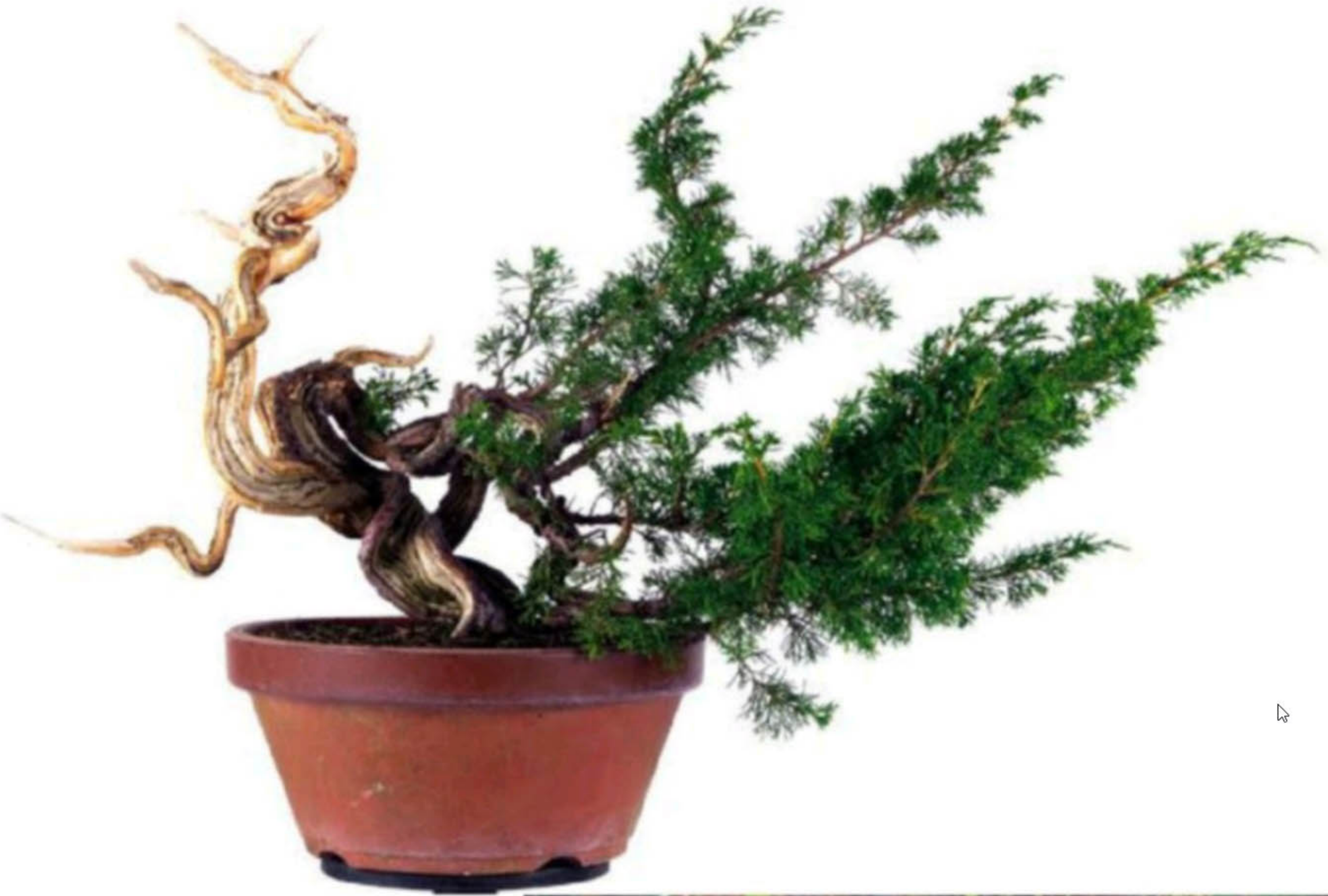


Tearing and shredding the branch tips with pliers



The blunt-cut branch tips are torn into finer strands using pliers. Compared to cutting with a knife, this technique produces a more natural-looking finish

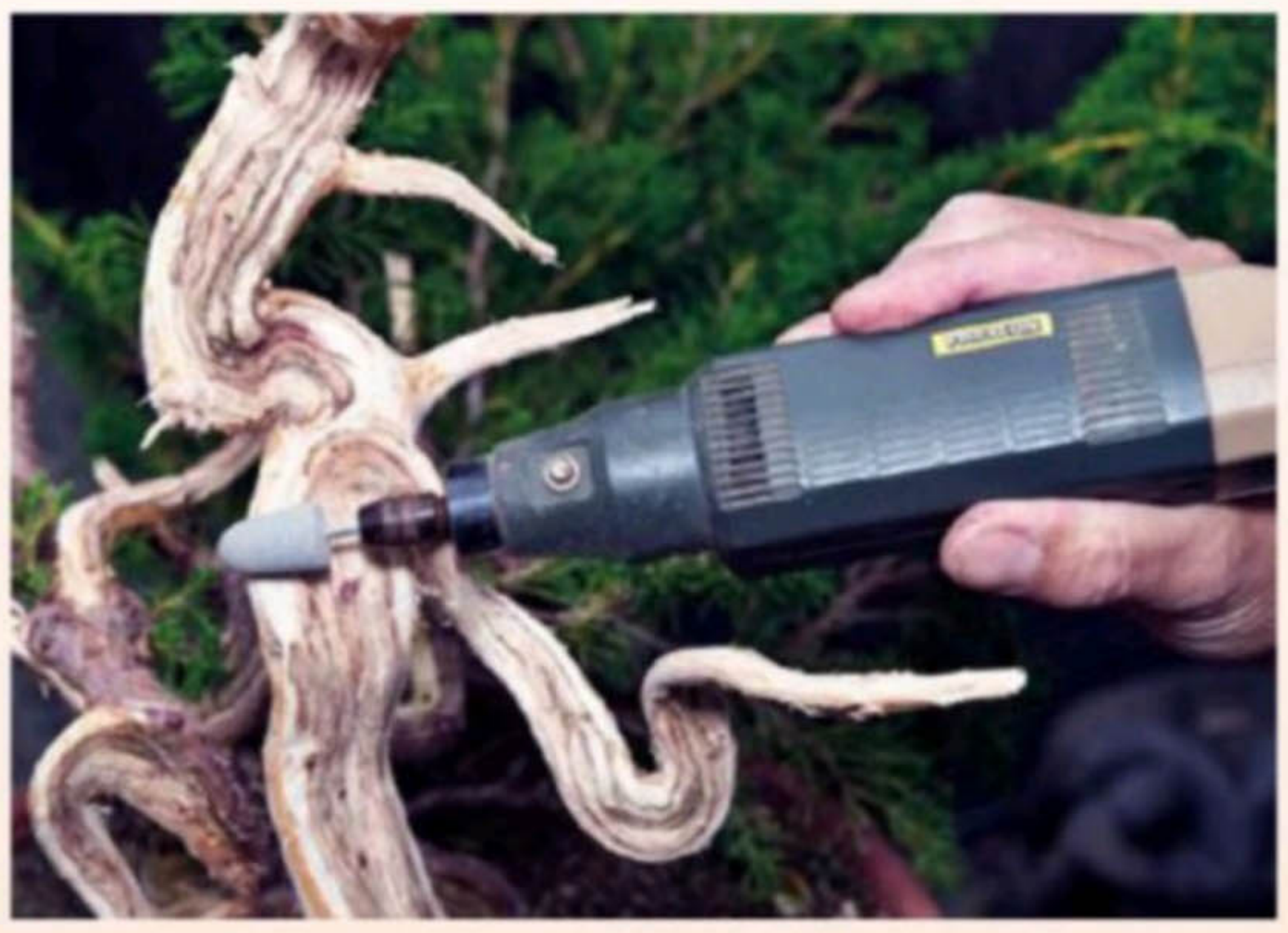
After processing the jin tips. However, the work of creating jin and shari was not yet complete



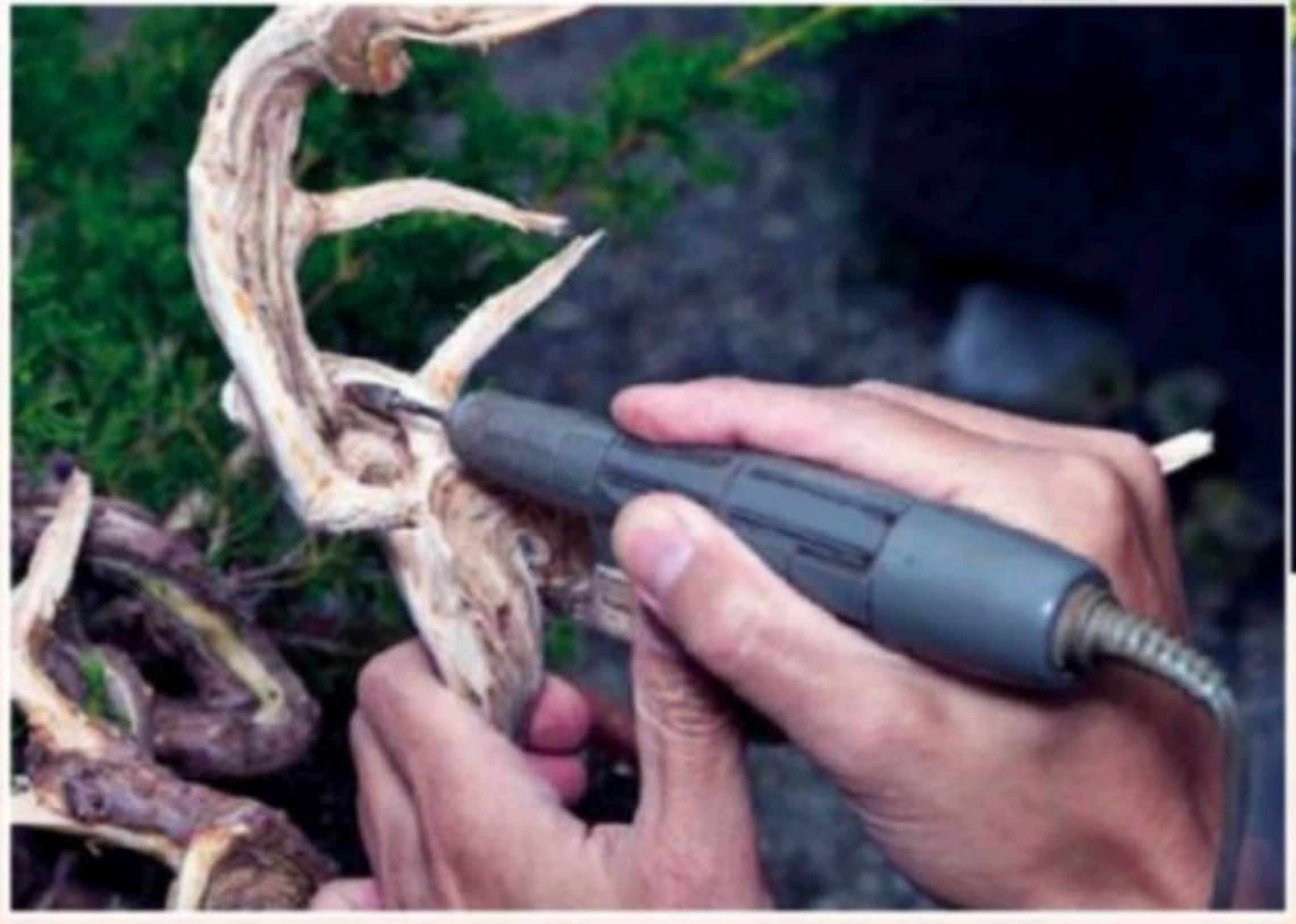
Finishing the jin and shari beautifully

Once the branches are cut and a rough concept for the tree's jin and shari is in place, the next step is to remove the cambium layer completely by using power tools, moving toward the final finish. Since the carving effect varies, depending much on the shape of the tool tip, it's important to select different bits for different areas.

Because the foliage and branches had been left intact until just before this stage, the live veins had thickened, so simply removing the cambium brought out a natural texture and undulation in the board-style shari.



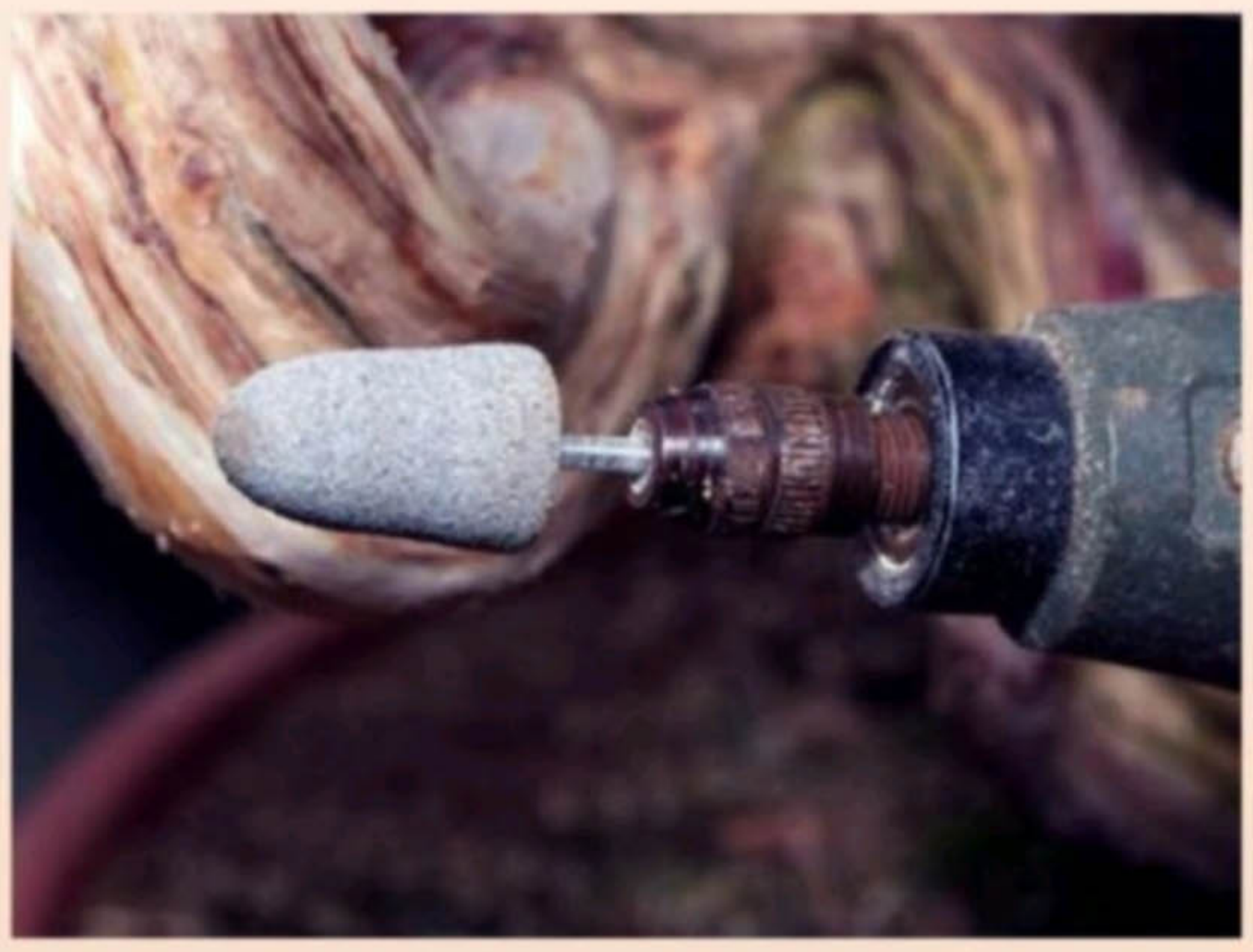
Mounted grinding stone. Especially effective for smoothing flat, open areas and can also be used for cleaning pots

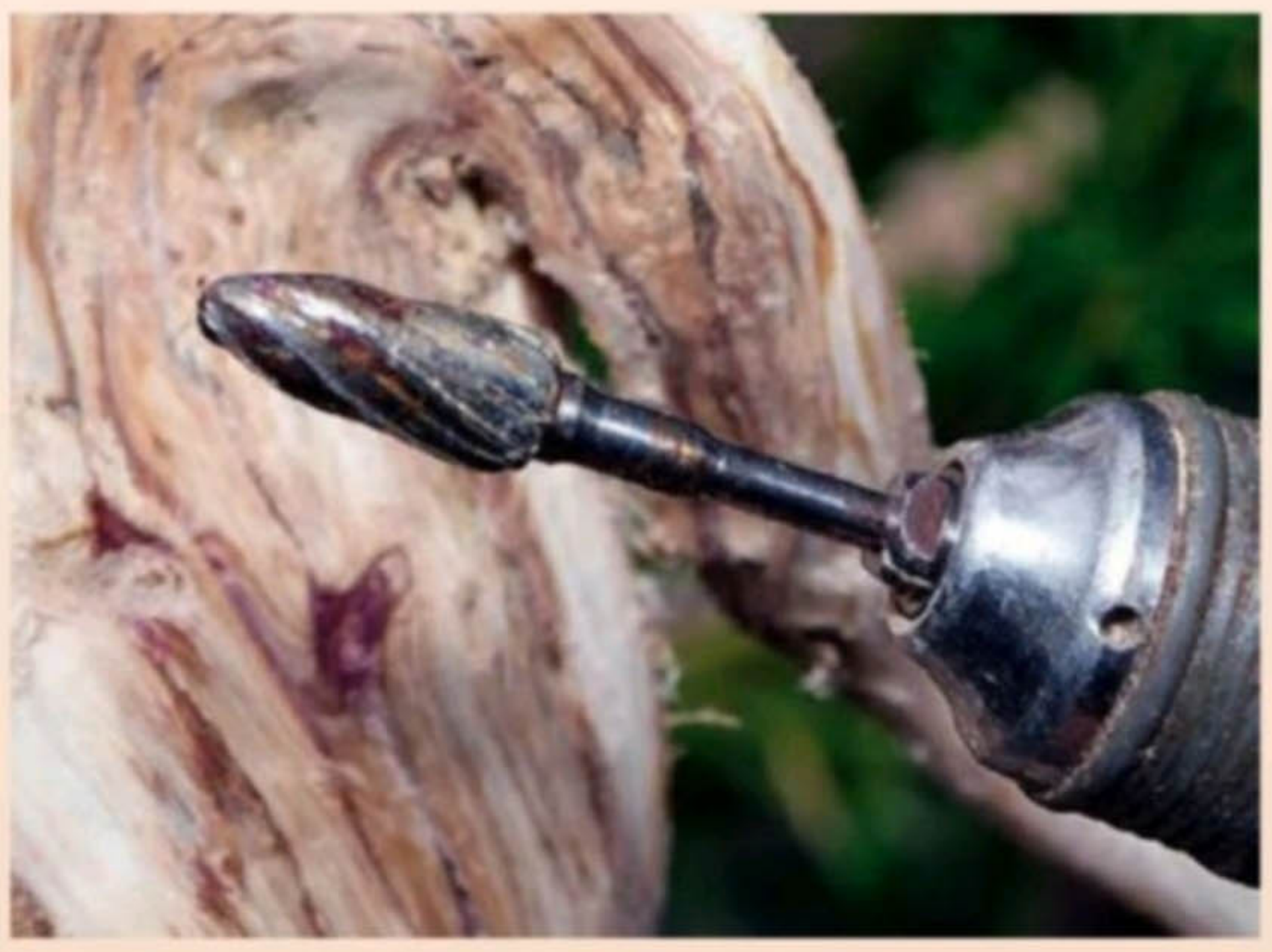


A rotary rasp. The rasp shown here is one that has been heavily used. It provides controlled shaping on uneven surfaces

Attention to drill bit selection

Choose 'grinding-type' bits for the drill. The shape of the bit tip affects ease of use and resulting shape and texture. Nobuyuki applied two to three types depending on the area.



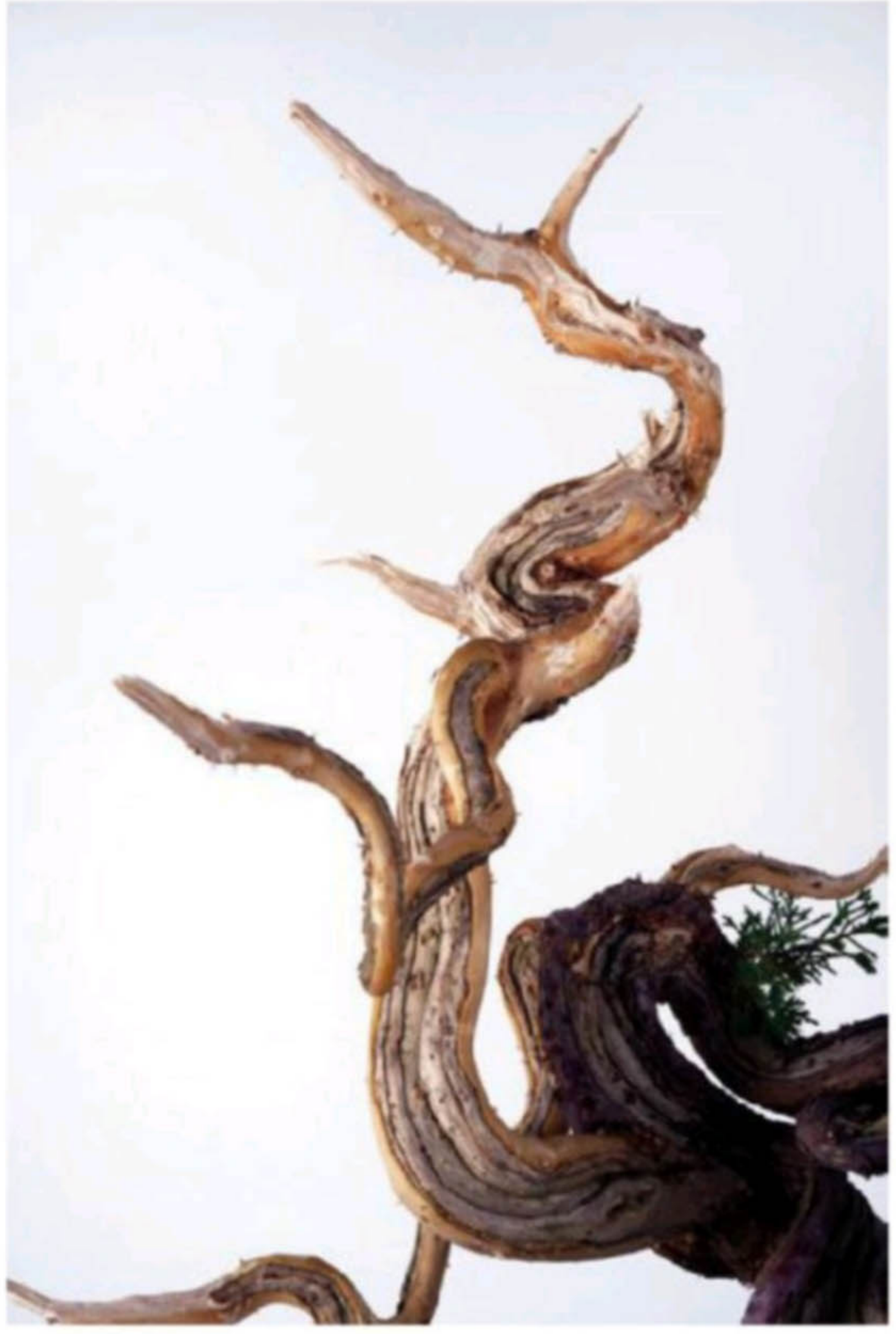


Why it is a masterpiece, a creation in harmony with nature

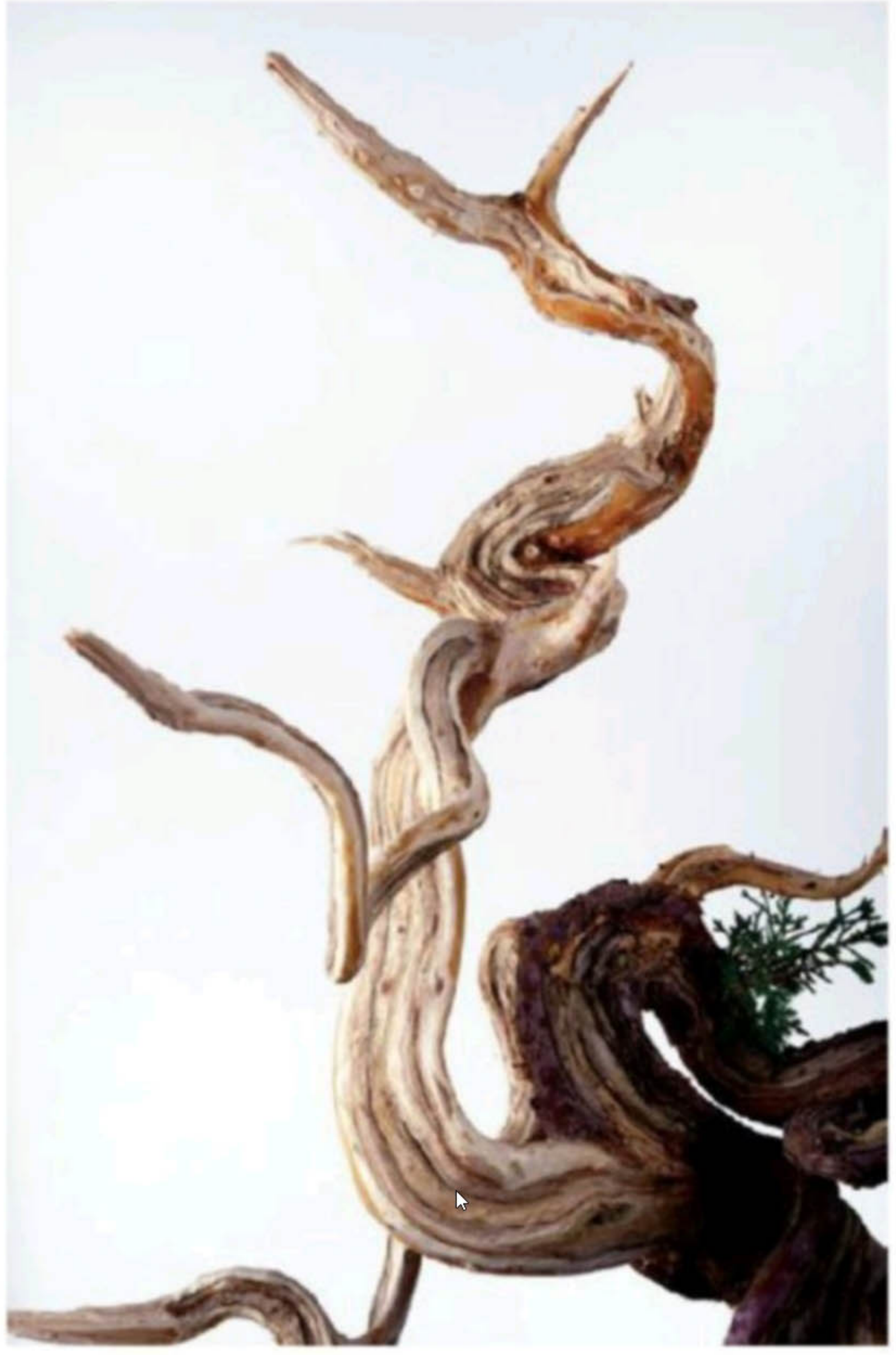
We asked Nobuyuki about the character and appeal of the exceptional shohin shimpaku material that the 'Master of Shinshu' has produced for decades. 'My impression is that everything is created with precise calculation. When actually working on a tree like this, you realise that the grain of the wood, what remains as the skeleton of the tree, is clearly defined. With other materials, you often see awkward carving that cuts across the grain, ending up seeming like an artificial tree. But with this person's material, only what's truly necessary remains, from the base to the tip of the trunk, and the final result appears close to a natural tree. You can't achieve that unless you've been thinking three, four steps ahead since the time when the tree was still young.'

'Despite being some juniper material with shari and even if the process involves thickening the cuttings of a well-selected genetic line and then carving them, the outcome isn't the same. Simply carving clean lines isn't enough. It's all about carving in a way that mimics natural decay, and allowing the tree to thicken over time, and then only removing what's necessary — this is the essence of a true Master's work. It's not easily imitated. The material seems to be created by the re-creation of a natural environment and adhering to the principles of nature. That's why the shari also lasts longer.

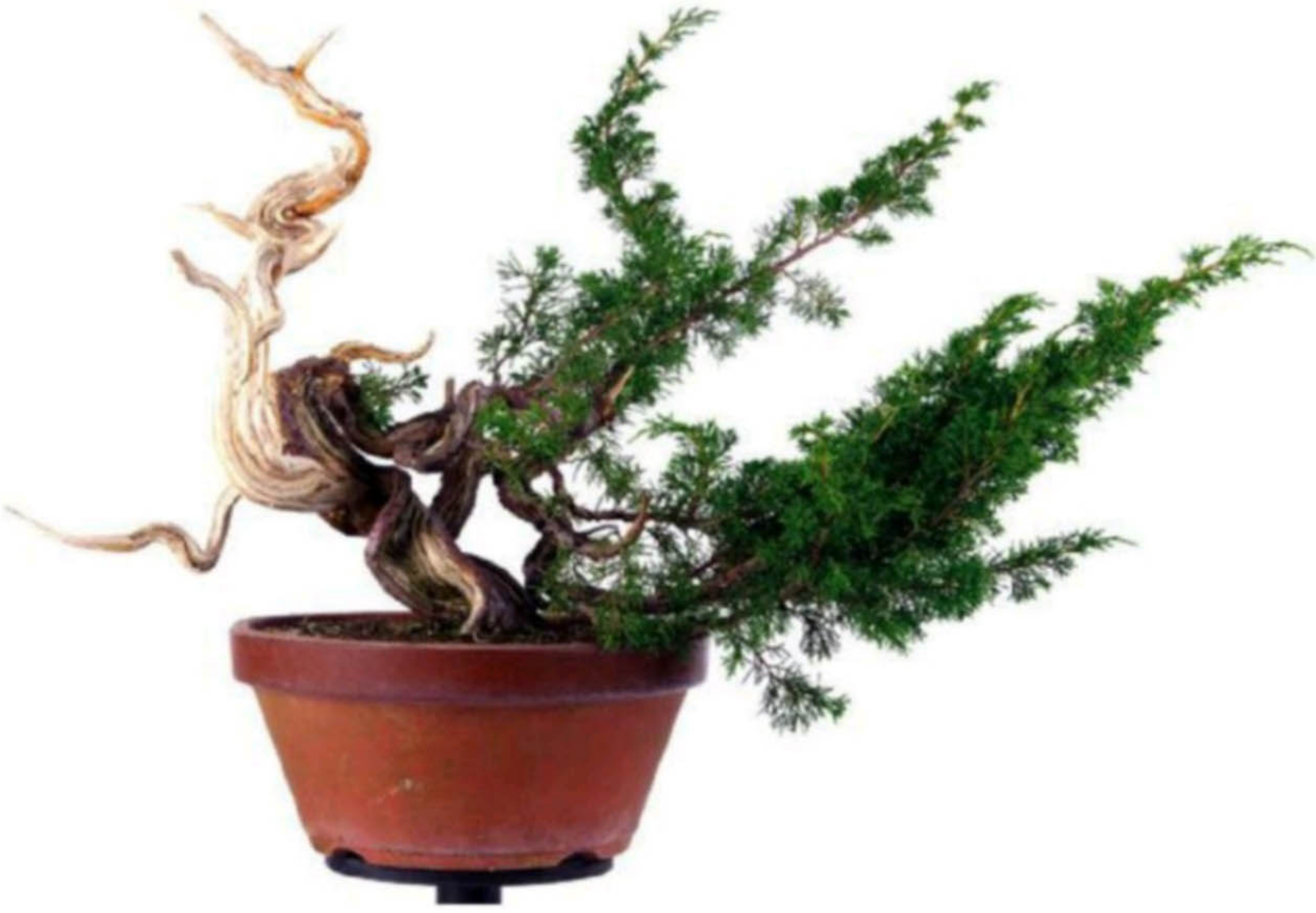
'His catchphrase is: I want to create yamadori-style trees in shohin size. Many of the famous juniper masterpieces still in existence today were created by this individual. That's what makes them so valuable and so extremely popular among professionals.' — Nobuyuki Hirose



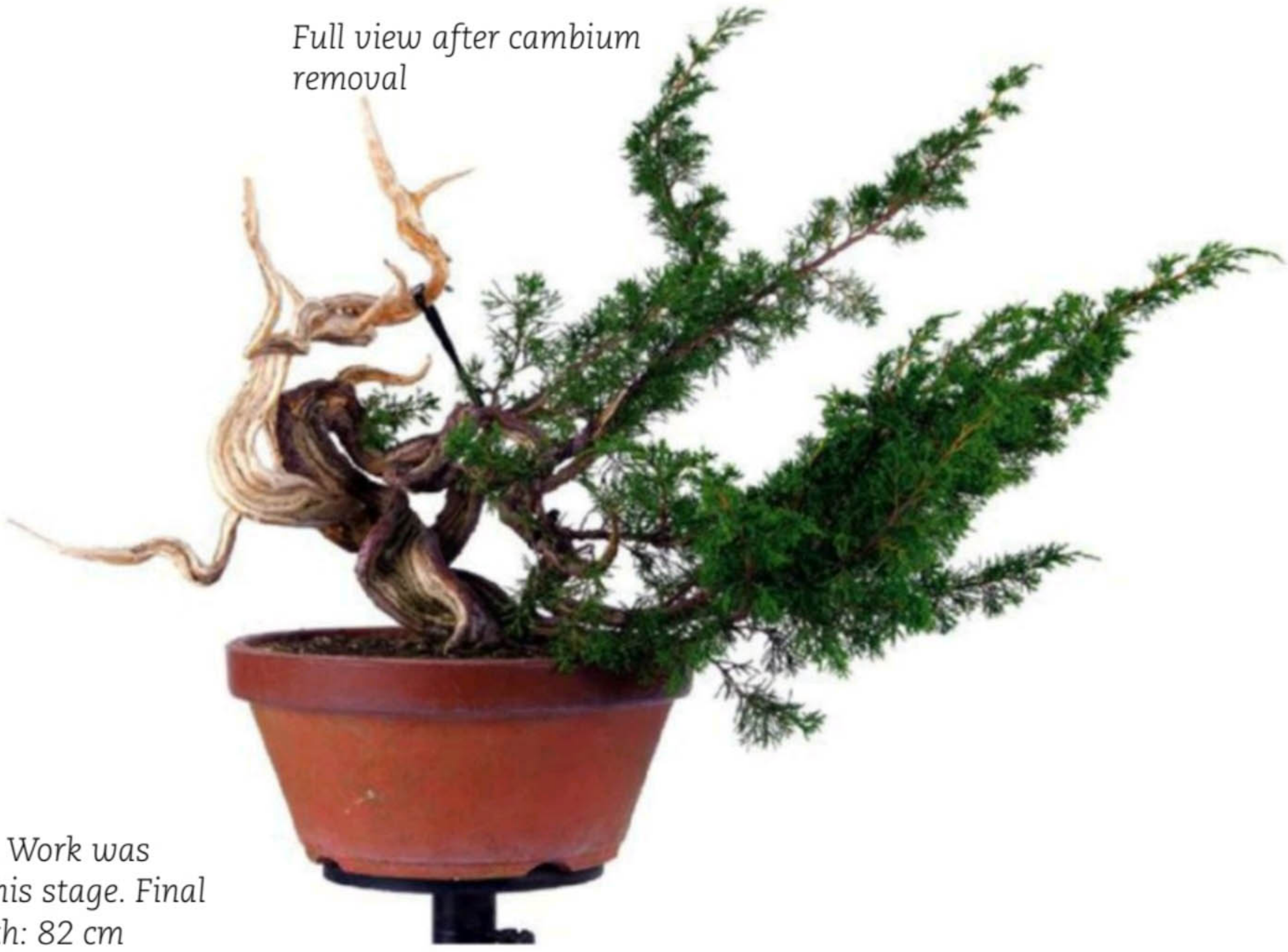
The left portion, intended to remain as ten-shari sticking up and out of the apex, with bark removed. The cambium (yellowish shiny layer) still remains



The same area after the lower half of the cambium was removed using a power tool. The result is a naturally-shaped board-style shari with swells at either end



Full view after cambium removal

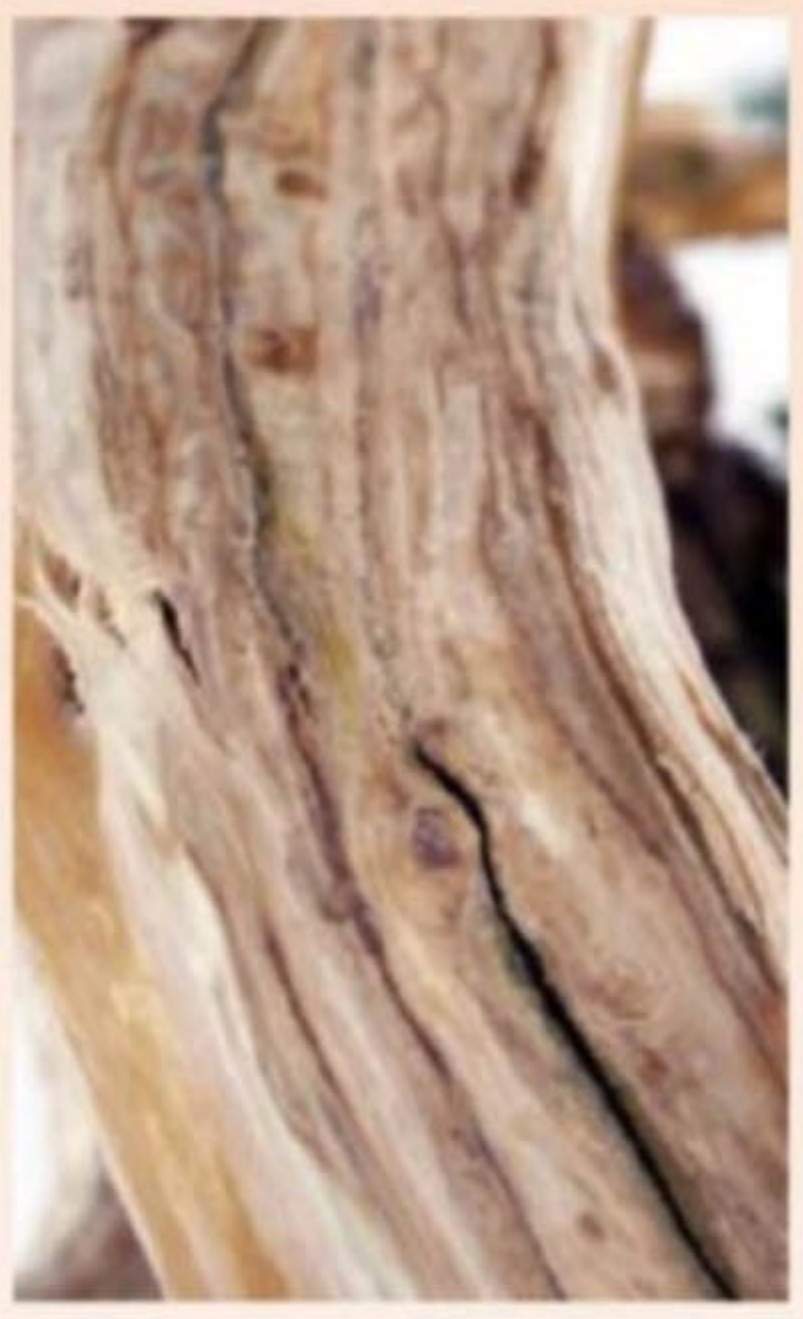


After bending the shari. Work was stopped for the day at this stage. Final size: Height 40 cm Width: 82 cm

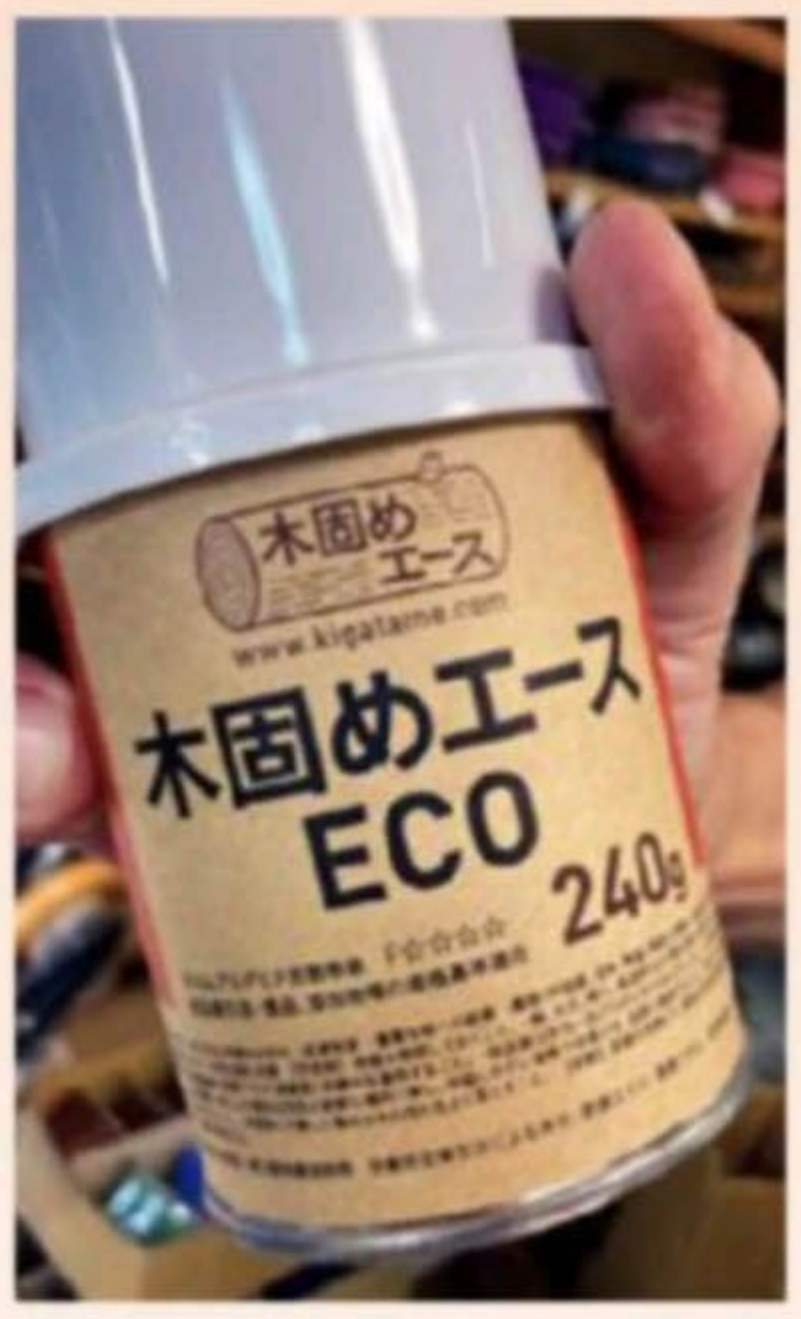
Bending the fresh wood

When the wood is still fresh and pliable, the jin and shari can be bent according to the overall design concept. Especially after rainfall, when the wood is softer and it becomes even easier to shape. After keeping it in this position for about six months to a year to set the form, the plan is to use a hobby-grade wood hardener to fix it permanently.

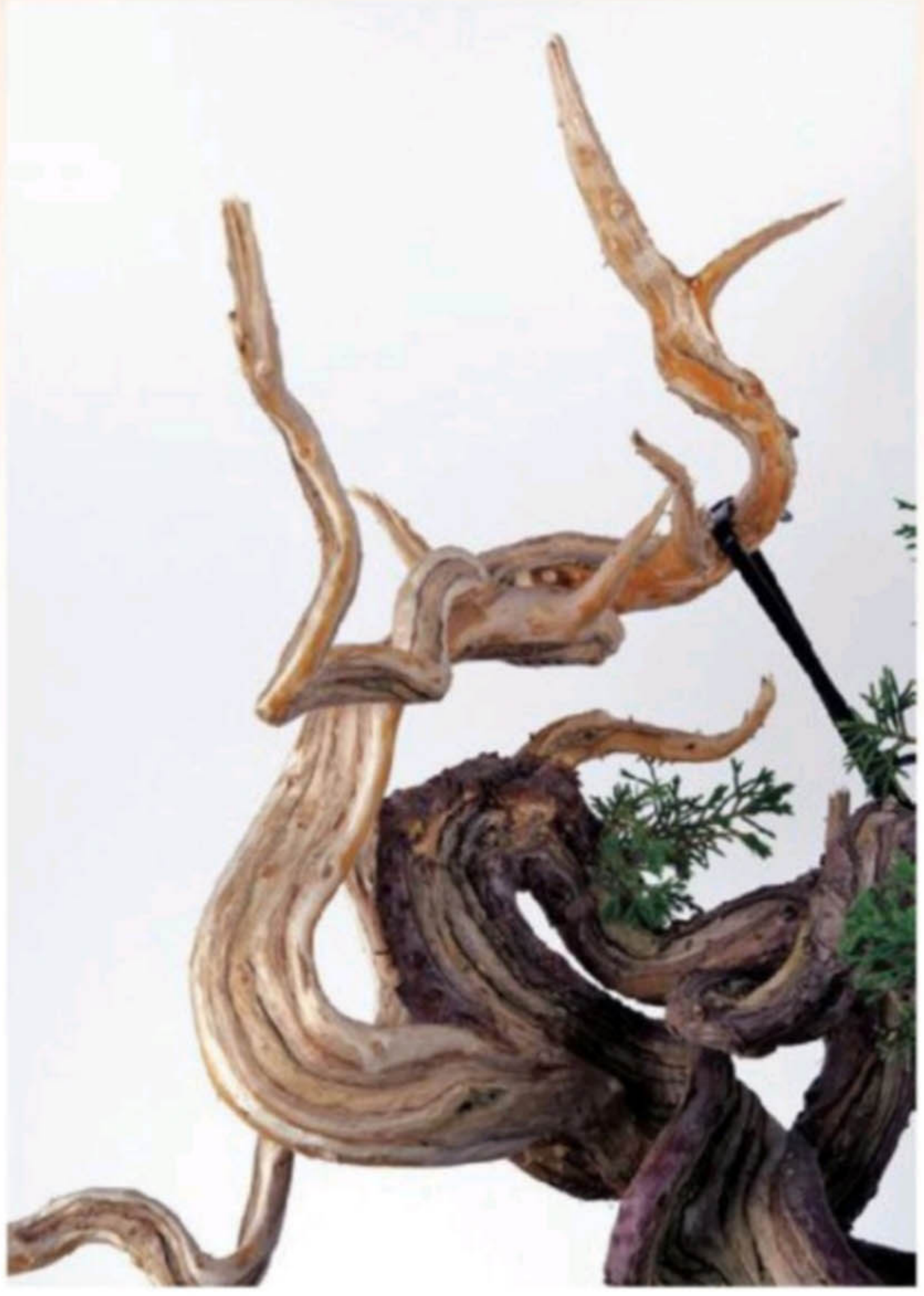
Just like bending thick branches, two people slowly bend the shari



A slight split is visible in the shari, but as long as it stays in this state, it's not a problem. The rest is up to time



After holding this shape for about six months to a year, a hobby wood hardener will be applied to fix it in place

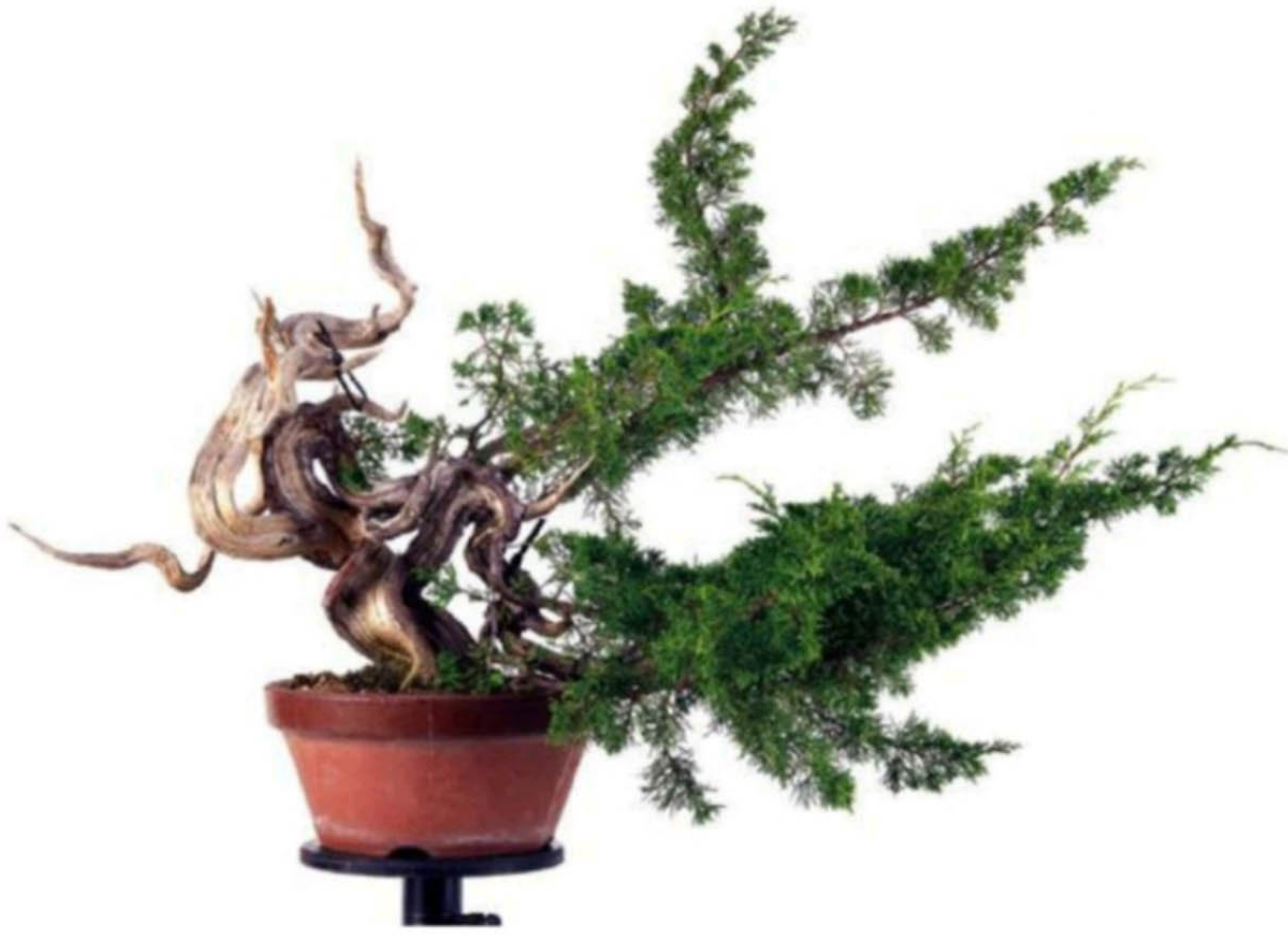


> *While it's still alive, it can be bent*

At the moment the branches were removed and turned into jin and shari, it was possible to bend it this much. It was secured with locking cable ties

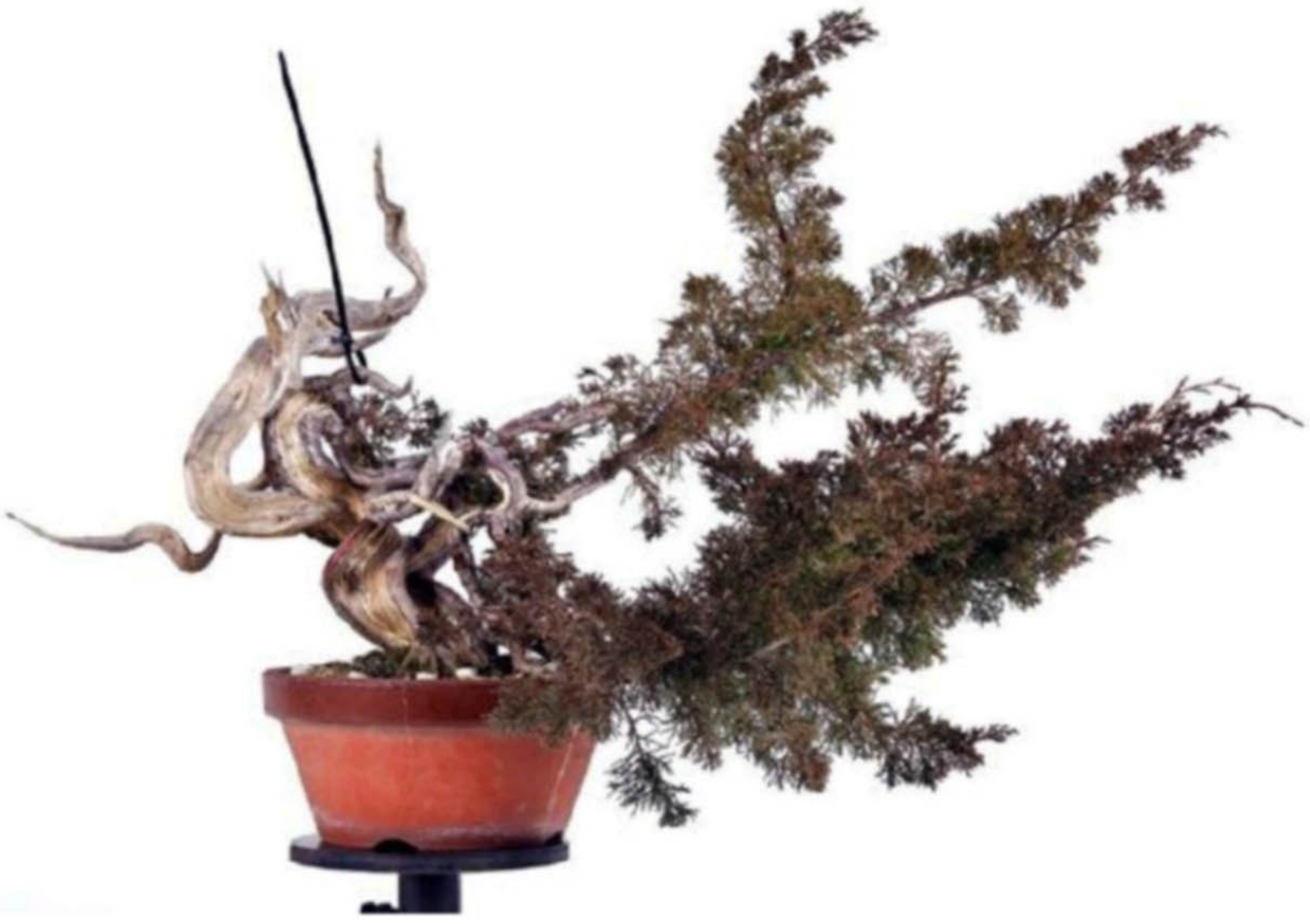
SEPTEMBER 5, 2023

Height: 56 cm Width: 70 cm. While continuing to focus on extending the branches and foliage to build the tree's structure, it was repotted into a slightly smaller unglazed training pot in preparation for eventual placement in its final pot

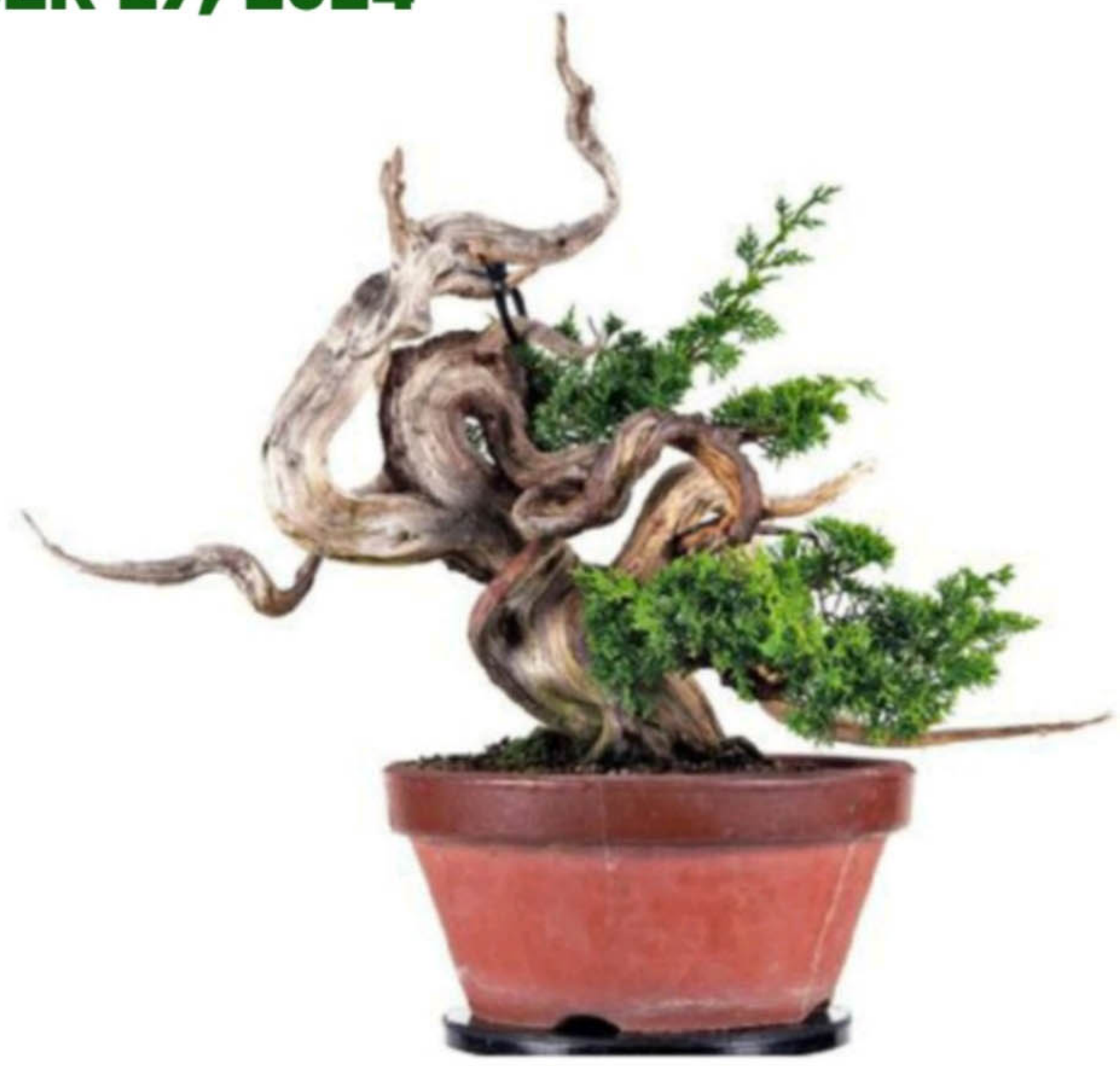


JANUARY 28, 2024

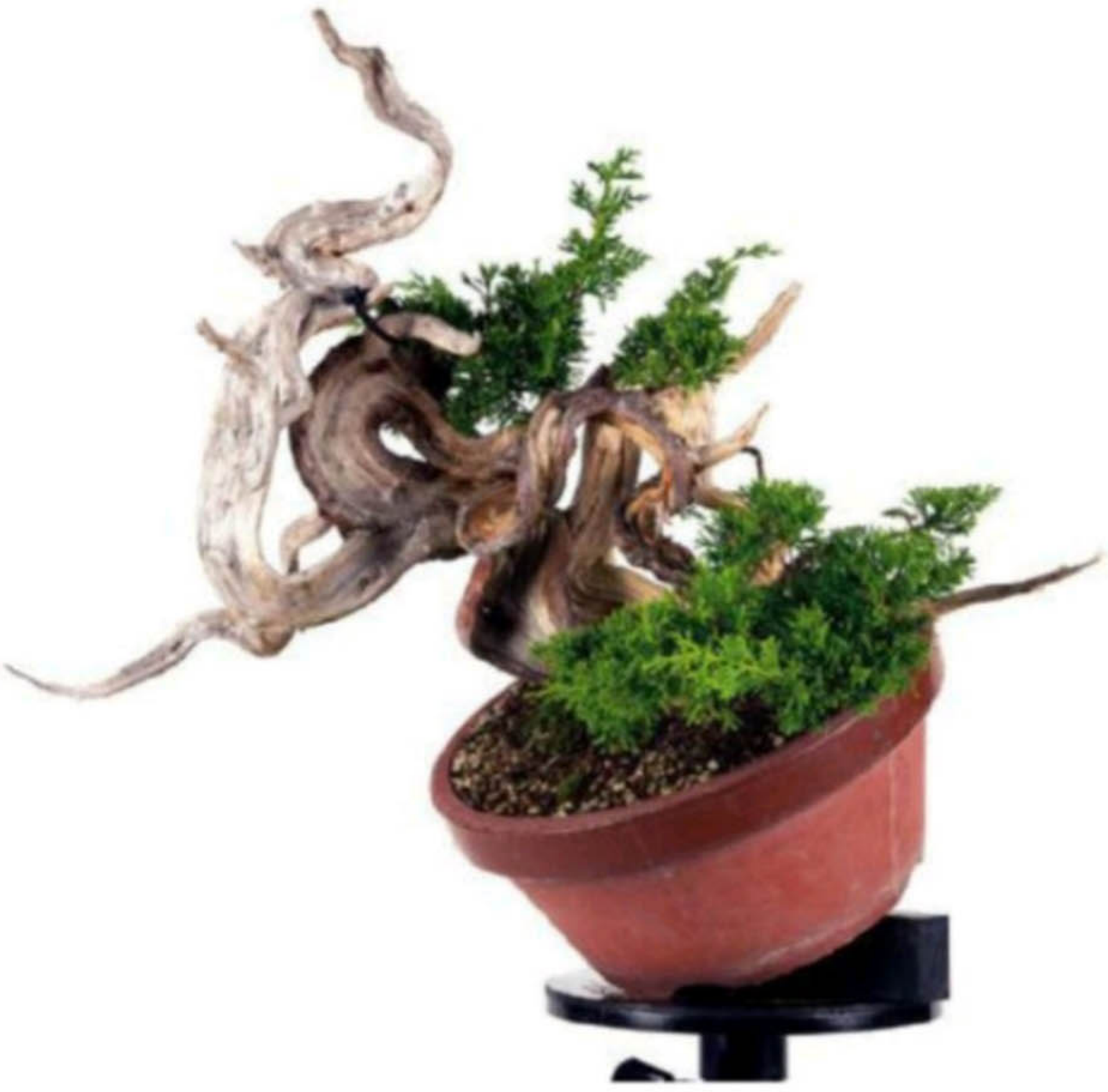
Winter form. Height: 57 cm Width: 72 cm. There are no significant changes in condition, but it is showing steady, healthy growth



SEPTEMBER 27, 2024



Before work. Height: 33 cm Width: 47 cm. In the meantime, unnecessary branches on the right side had been removed, and the branch and foliage volume had been reduced to the bare minimum

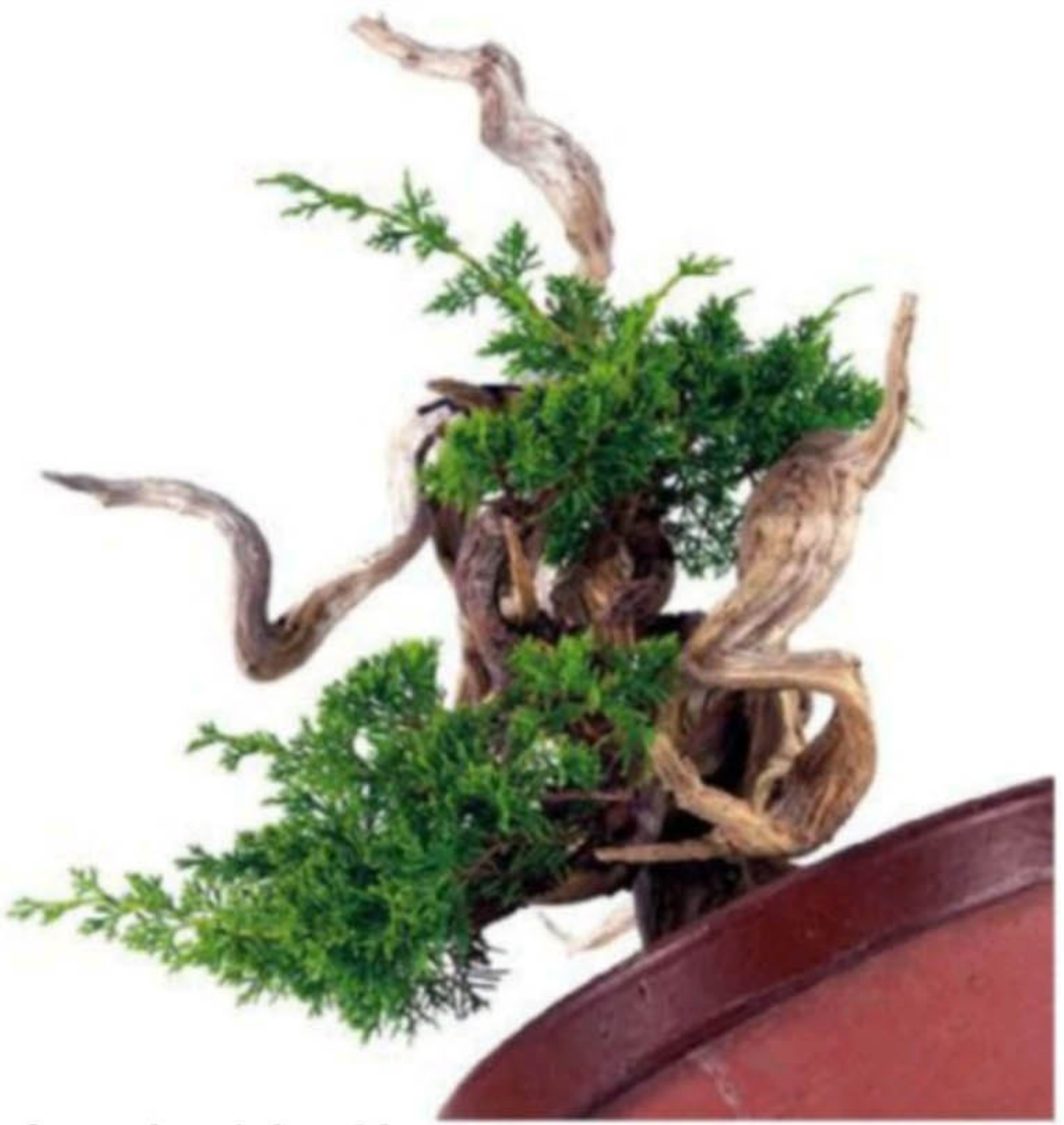


At this stage, the front and viewing angle were re-evaluated. Considering the board-style shari, apex jin, and overall flow of the branches, a position slightly left and forward-tilted was chosen as the new front

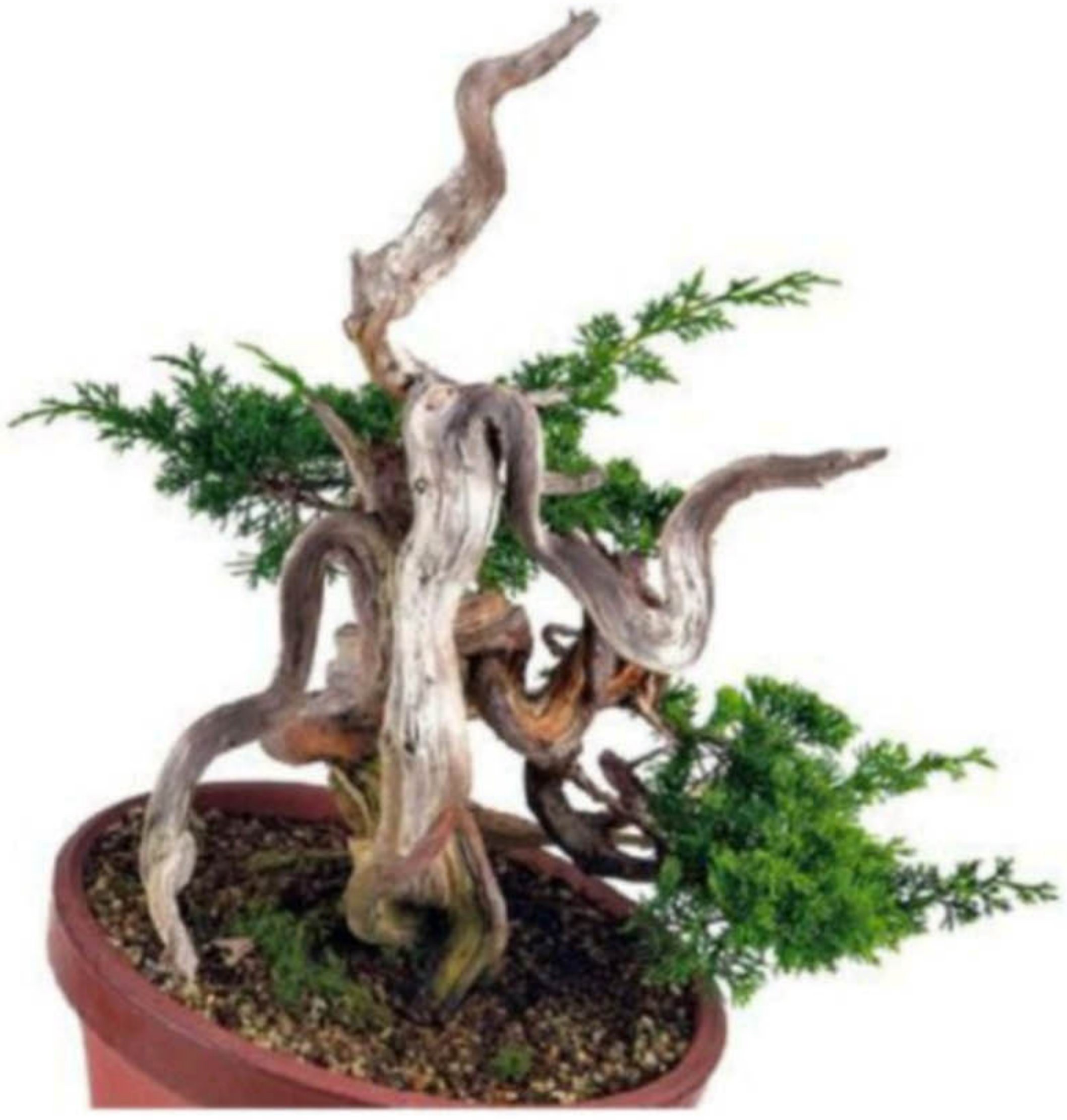
Styling begins with the essential minimum of foliage

A year had passed since the left side was turned into shari, and now the right-side foliage was reduced to the minimum of two shoots to begin the styling process. From the start, Nobuyuki had determined only these two shoots were necessary. However, the rest of the right-side foliage had been left in place until now to allow for natural thickening, especially in order to create realistic branch jin.

The front of the tree was also changed. Up to this point, a provisional front that emphasized the base had been used. But now, taking into account the overall trunk flow and future vision, a new front was chosen. Particular focus was placed on how the left-side shari was likely to be displayed, leading to the decision to tilt the tree slightly forward and to the left.



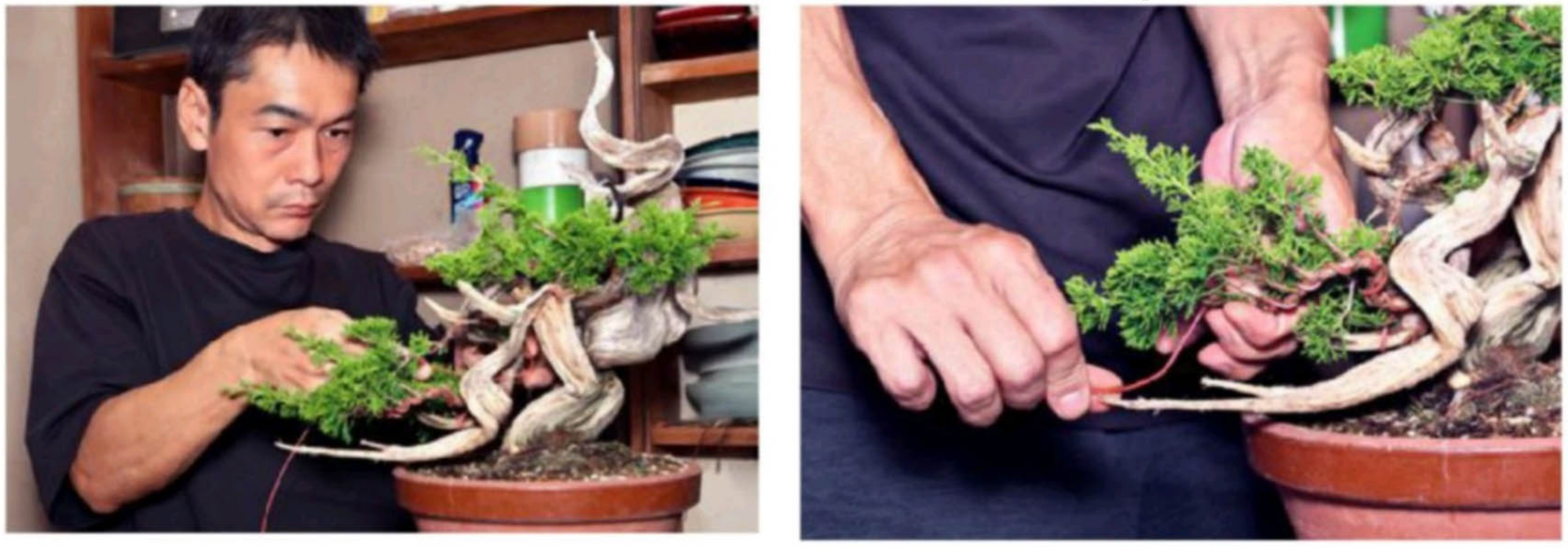
Seen from the right side



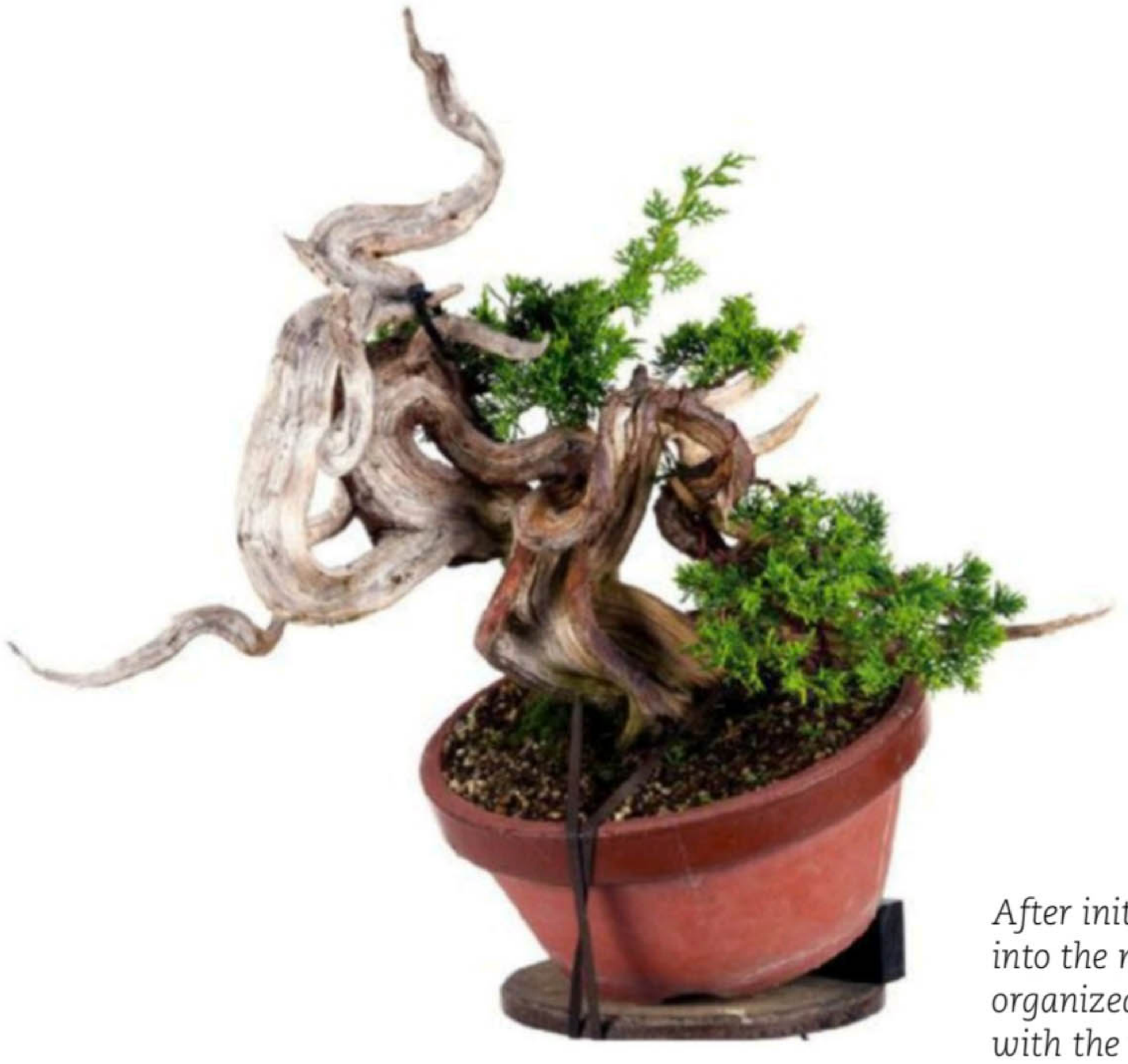
Seen from the left side

Styling the lower branch

The lower branch is relatively thick, so a heavy-gauge wire is applied and bends are introduced over a short distance. Movement in both vertical and horizontal directions is considered to shape the branch with character



Result after styling the lower branch



After initial styling of the lower branch. While introducing movement into the main branch the foliage on the smaller twigs is reduced and organized compactly. Care is also taken to ensure it doesn't interfere with the visual strength of the trunk's rise

Seen from the left side

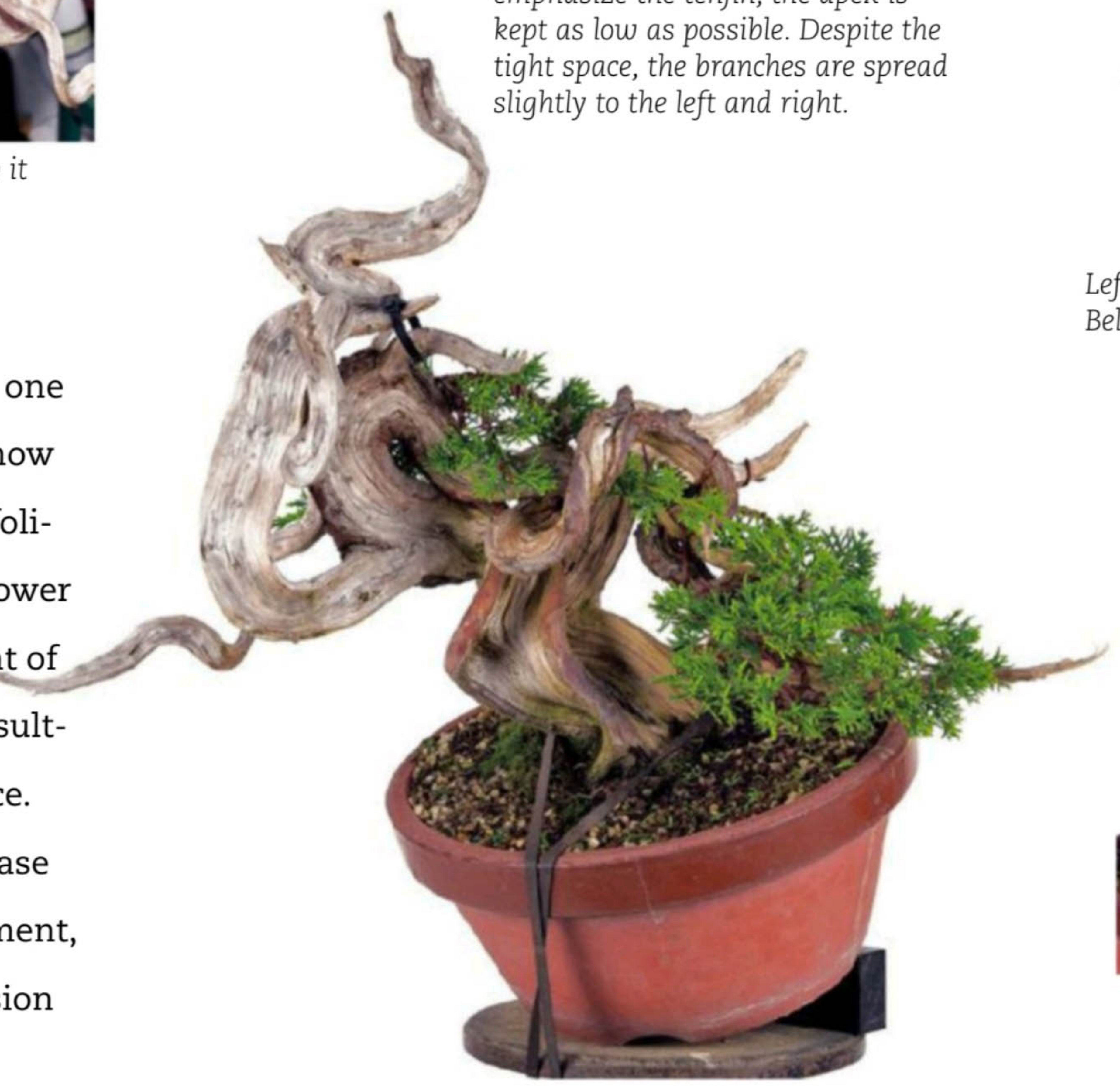
Seen from the right side

> *The first baby steps towards the refined form*

Shaping the apex

The apex area is also wired thoroughly to keep it compact and controlled

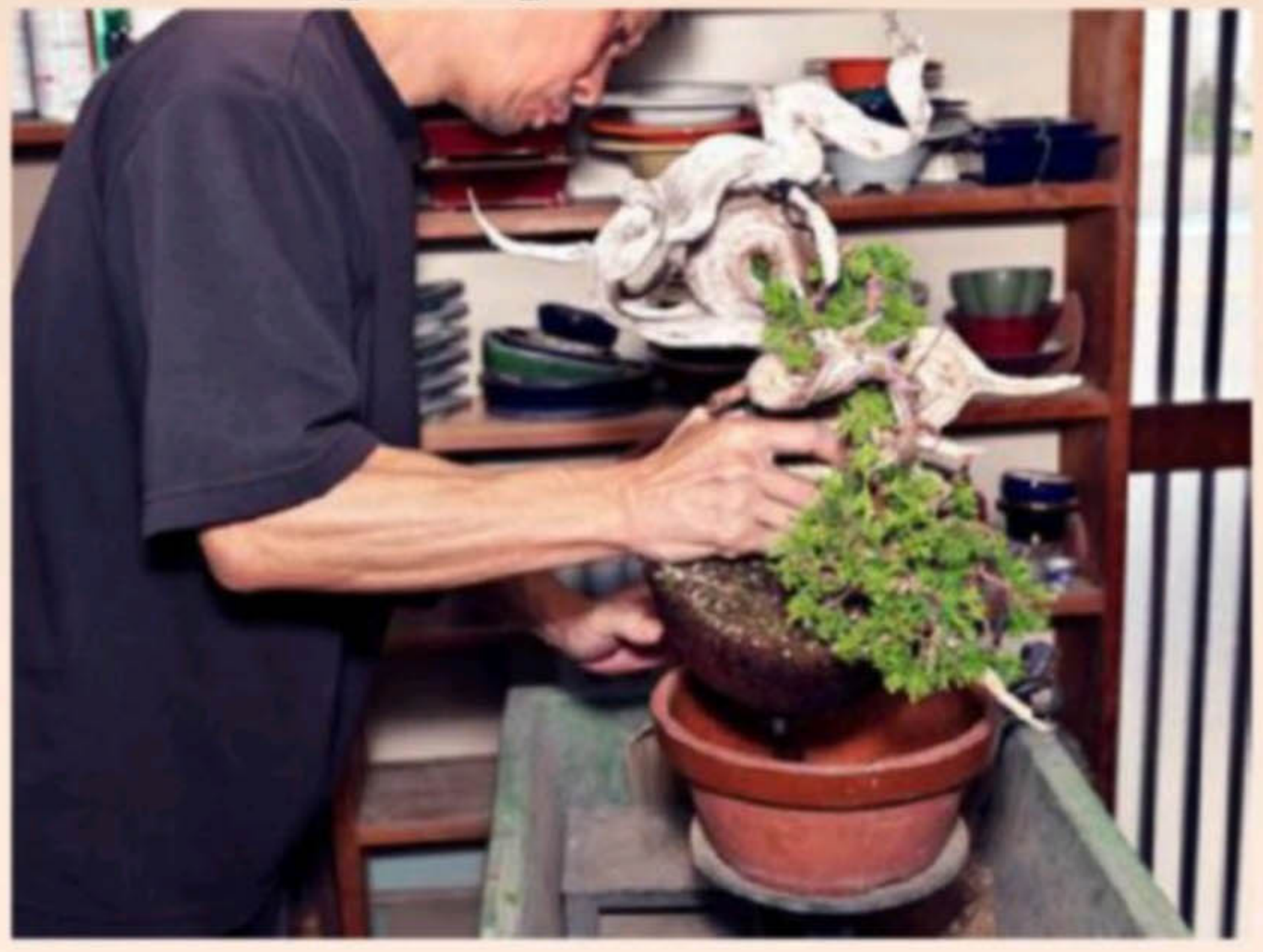
Currently, the tree has only two branches, one lower branch and one at the apex, so the key challenge is how to distribute the limited amount of foliage effectively. Compared with the lower branch, which retained a fair amount of foliage, the apex has slightly less, resulting in a somewhat sparse appearance. However, considering this as one phase in the long-term structural development, objectives of the current styling session have been achieved.

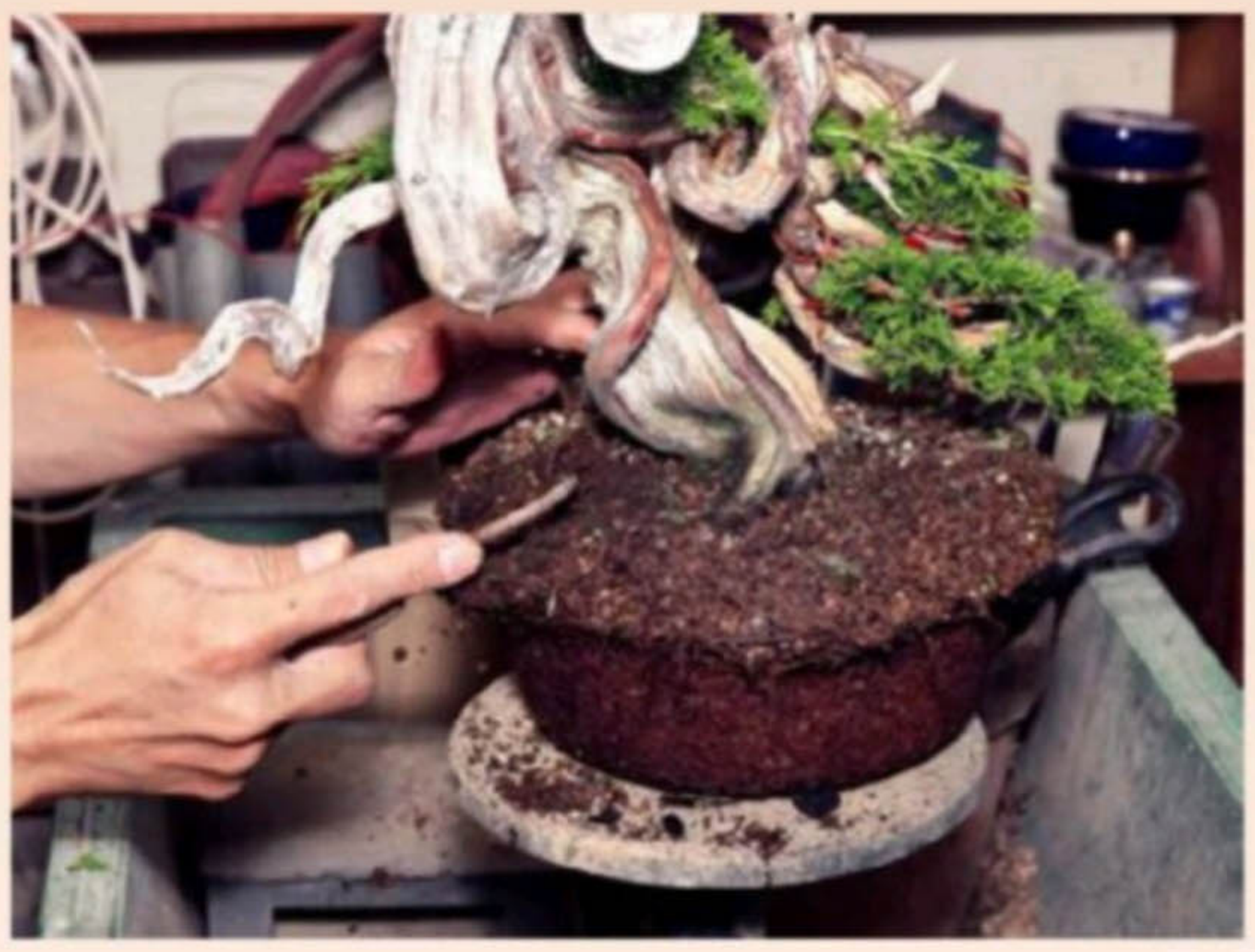


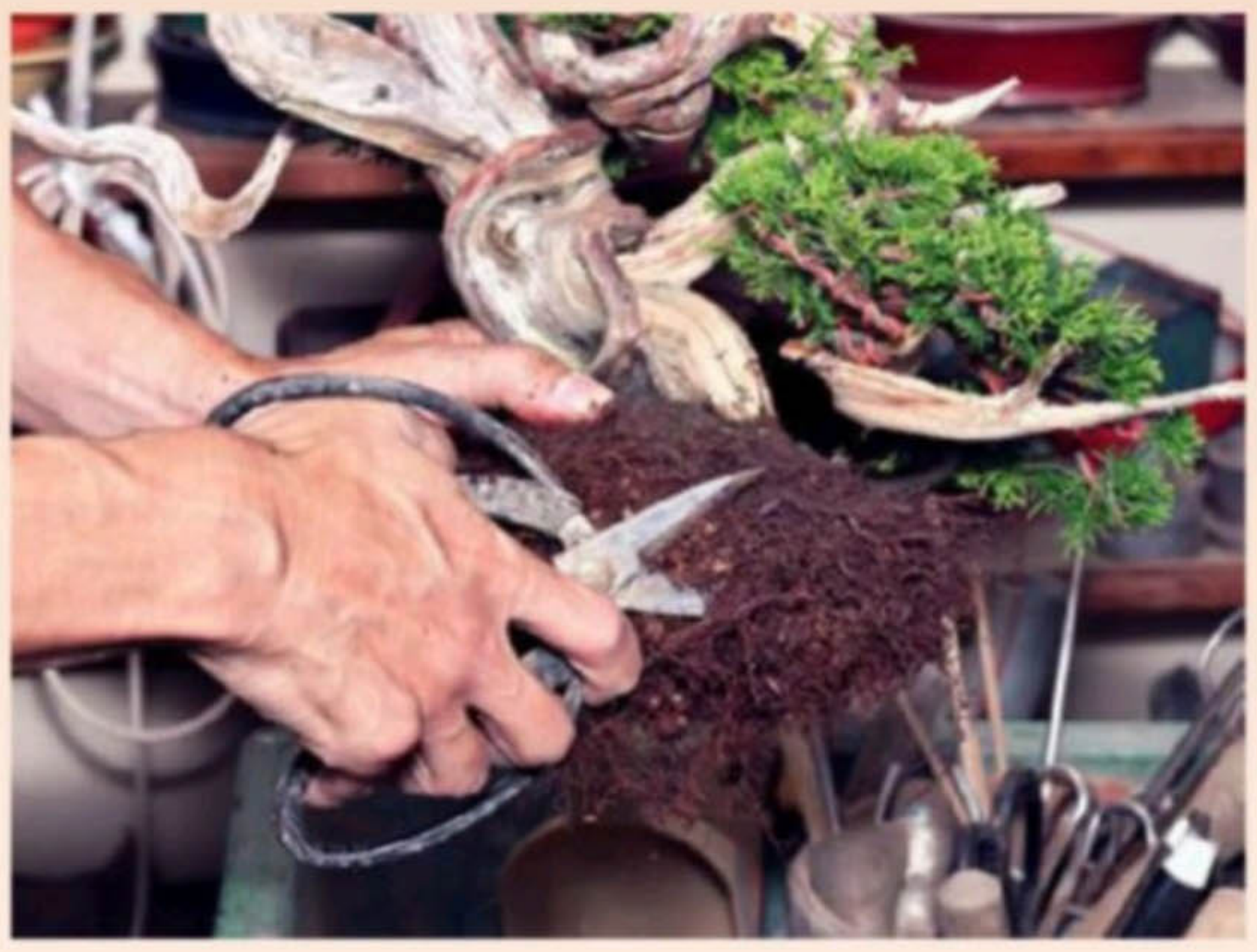
After rough wiring the apex. To emphasize the tenjin, the apex is kept as low as possible. Despite the tight space, the branches are spread slightly to the left and right.

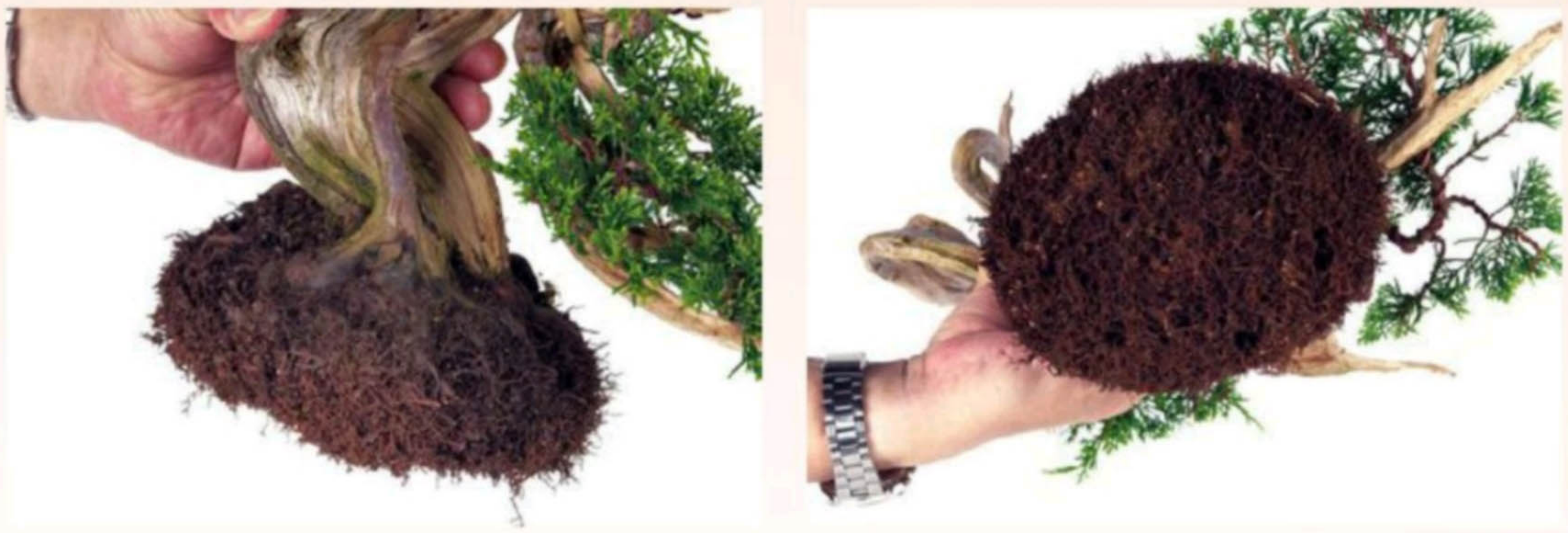
Left: Seen from the right side.
Below: Seen from the left side

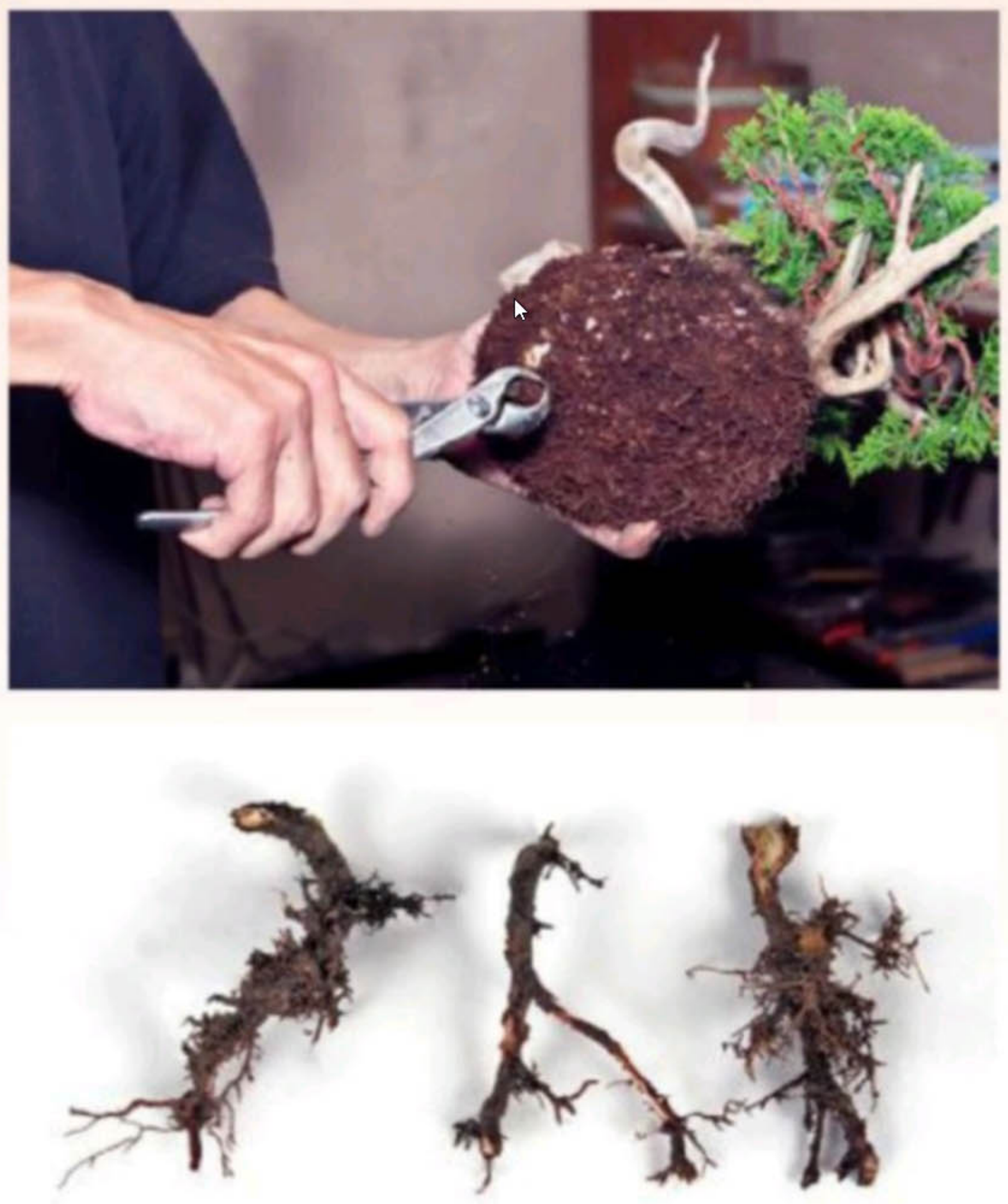
Repotting to get the final shape


The tree is removed from the pot. The root ball has not yet fully developed


Using a root rake to remove soil. Special care is taken not to damage the surface roots

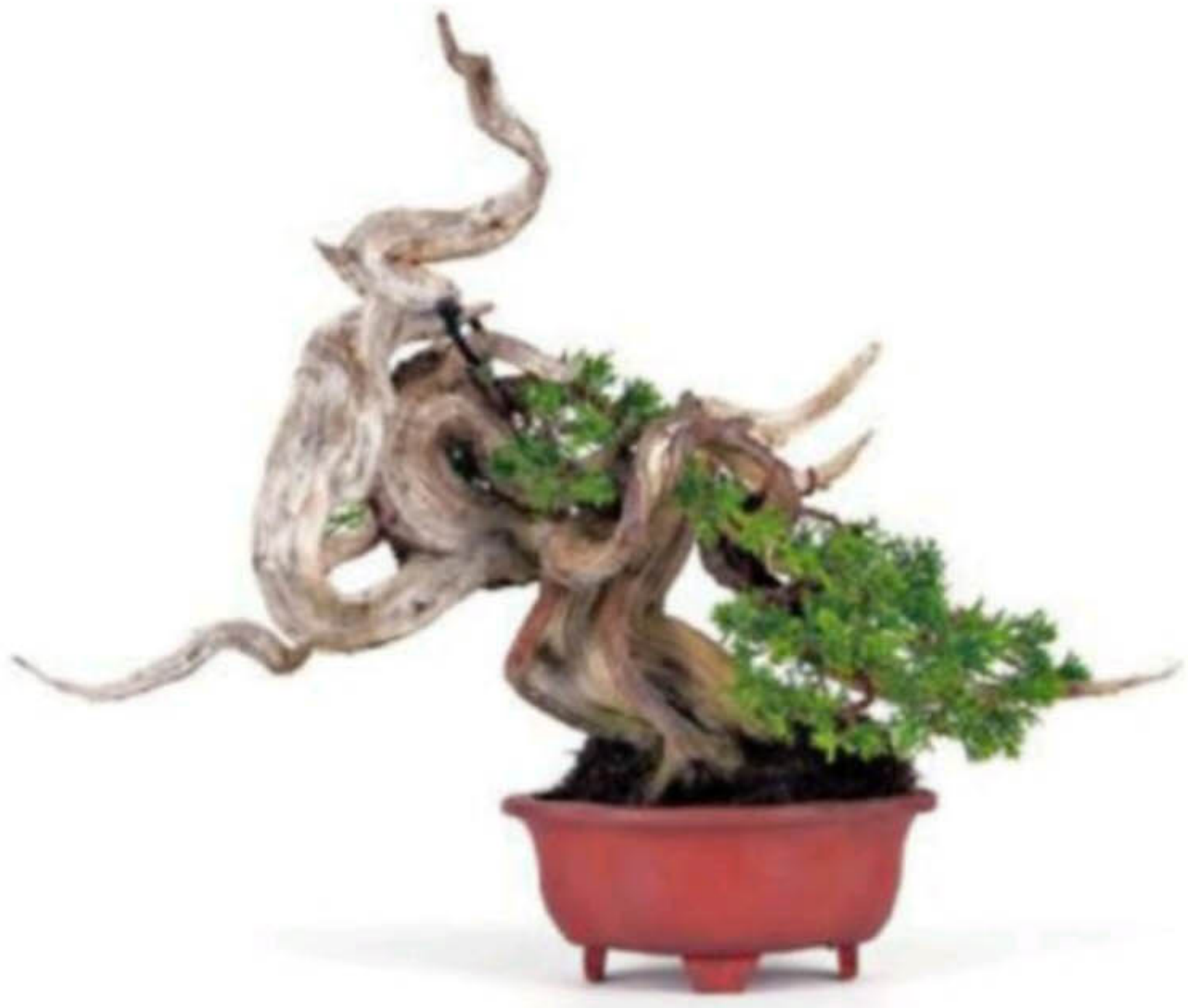

Small peripheral roots are trimmed around the root ball

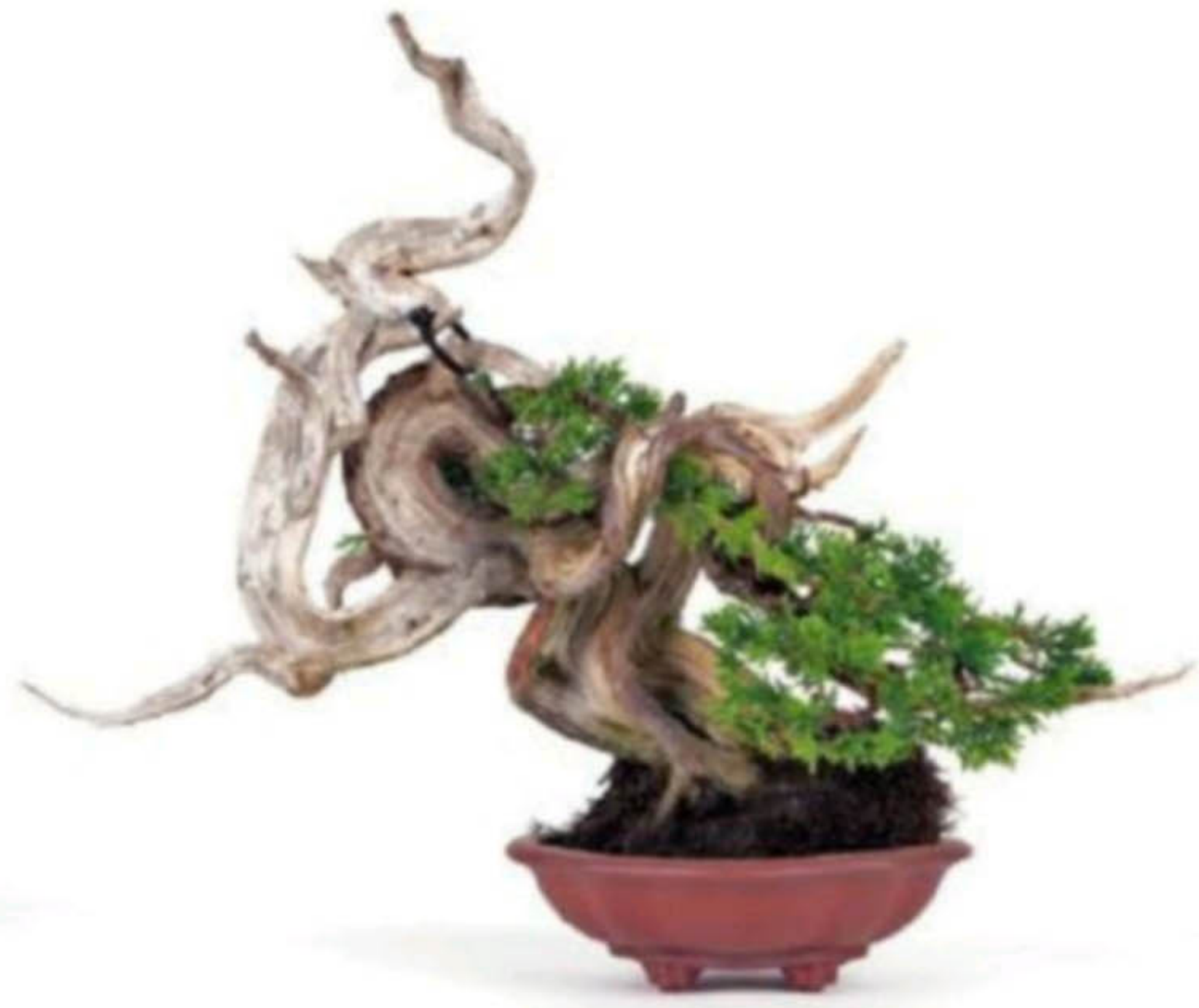

After rough root pruning. Under normal circumstances, planting would proceed at this stage, but . . ..


The root ball is reduced further, more soil is removed, and newly exposed thick roots are cut to reduce the overall root mass

Pot selection

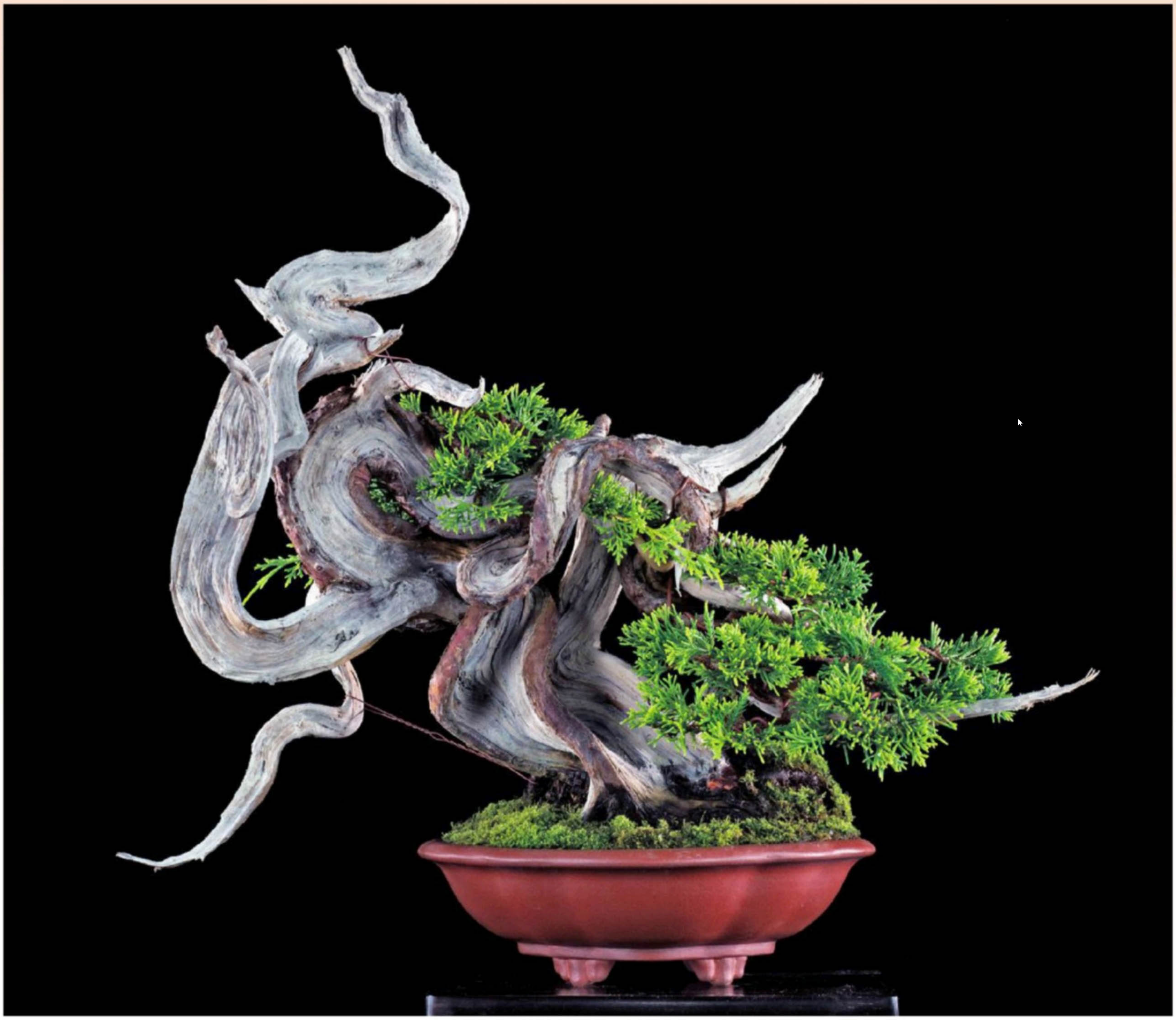
The tree is placed in the intended pot. Nobuyuki meticulously checks the angle, height, and front


This deeper mokko-style pot by Ikko is not bad, but might appear slightly overpowering


A shallower Ikko mokko-style pot is tested next. It matches the dynamic character of the jin and shari perfectly

It looks as if the tree can now be planted in the ideal position. It is secured in place with wire

Soil is added and firmly tamped down. Repotting work is complete



After completion of the work:
Tree height: 33 cm Width: 47 cm (foliage area only: 16 × 27 cm).
After the planting was finished, Nobuyuki Hirose has pulled down the jin extending to the lower left, using a guy wire. This added vertical movement to the shari, creating a broader and more dynamic visual landscape. It was one of those elements that only become apparent once the tree is placed in its final pot, an important point for him

This work has documented the valuable process of elevating a remarkable piece of material into a top level bonsai. What emerged throughout was the artist's unwavering philosophy of discerning each tree's unique character and fully drawing it out.

The finished form is shown above. The length of the right lower branch turned out almost exactly as planned, though the crown could use a bit more fullness. As seen just before the final photoshoot, when the lower left jin was pulled down for a stronger effect, the shape of the jin and shari may well continue to evolve depending on how the foliage develops. Still, as the first baby steps towards the tree's refined form, the most important outcome is that the path forward has clearly become visible.

Private show

Bonsai displayed in a Japanese garden

Text: Harrington Photography: Harry Harrington, Ashley Griffiths/Feral Hound Photography

During 2024 Harry Harrington was lucky enough to be invited to visit a private Japanese garden hidden away in a small rural village, surrounded by the rolling hills of middle England

The garden was built on a flat field more than a century before by visiting Japanese Garden Masters. It was landscaped, with a big hill created from the spoil of digging 7 koi ponds. It was then furnished with large stones, stone lanterns, tea houses and even a cottage, all imported directly from Japan.

Over the following century, the garden had quite a chequered past in terms of owners and had become a little rundown. Then, in 2018, Fraser and Albeiro bought the property and completely rejuvenated the garden. Despite having no previous experience of Japanese gardens, they cleared and restocked the ponds, rebuilt damaged structures and breathed new life into the landscape.

Albeiro had suggested holding a bonsai-related event within the garden and I decided that this would be the perfect place for me to display a number of my private bonsai.

While I enjoy seeing bonsai displayed at Shows in the standard 3-point display, with a scroll and an accent against a white or black backdrop, the use of the garden for the day meant that I had the opportunity to display a selection of trees from my collection in a more informal setting.

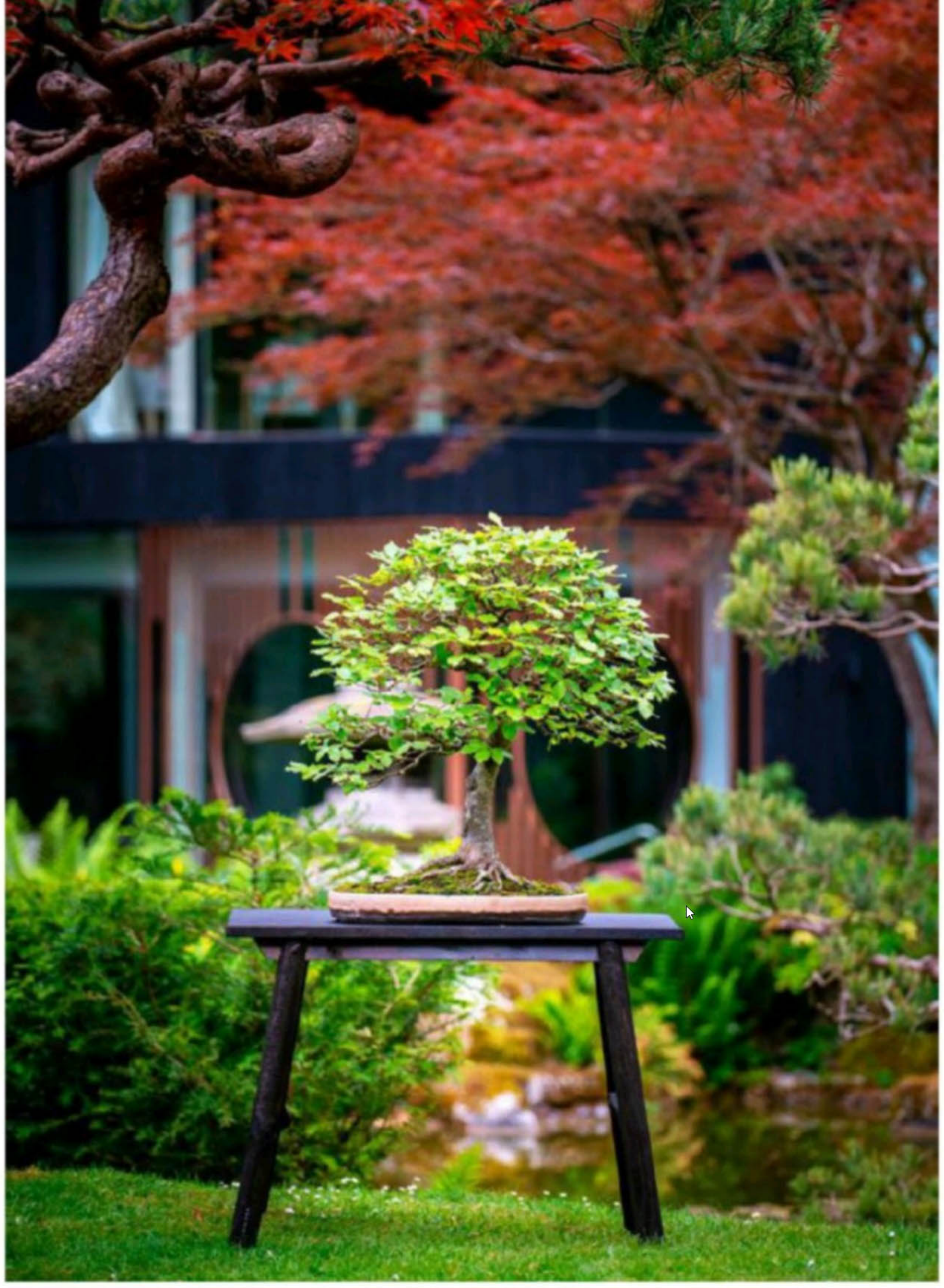
As a former gardener, this concept excited me more than displaying my trees in a hall. For me, bonsai are part and parcel of a Japanese garden. One where trees can be enjoyed in an informal environment. There was the temptation to hold a full Show for visiting enthusiasts, but the practical implications of several hundred cars trying to access the garden and a tiny village meant that I decided to keep the display private, and share it with the world via images and video.

On a recce visit in early spring this year, a small team of us decided a number of suitable views and vistas for my trees and we set about building traditional display tables and scrolls for the more traditional displays within the many tea houses and tokoname in the garden. Additionally, small subtle tables were built to elevate some of the bonsai so they could be placed within the landscape itself.

By the day of the event itself, in late May 2025, we were able to place the trees within the Japanese garden and with the help of photographer Ashley Griffiths, we photographed and videoed each bonsai in turn. Some of the trees I displayed have been in development with me for more than 20 years and it was the first time they had ever left my garden.

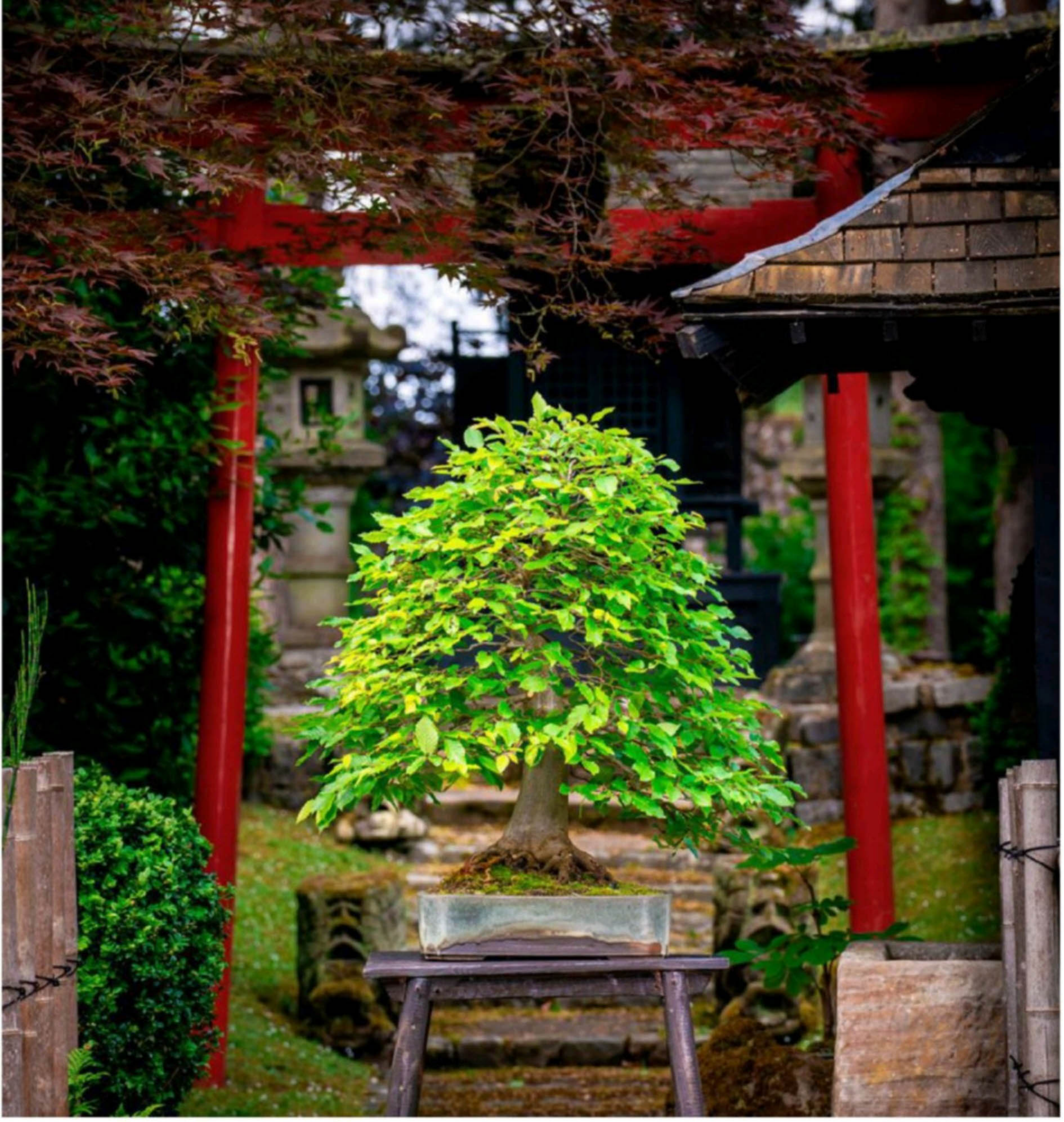
Following much interest beforehand, during the afternoon we were joined by members of the Japan Society and the Japanese Garden Society, both of them prestigious garden societies in the UK, and, much to my pleasure, we received a great deal of support for the display.

Fagus sylvatica.
Pot: Victor Harris of Erin Pottery / Bonsai
My European beech bonsai. Elevated off the ground on a simple table by David Harris, set against a background of a koi pond and a large red Acer palmatum. *I love the twisting overhanging branch of a* Scots pine *that has been regularly pruned at the garden for more than a century.*
Many will be familiar with the story of this bonsai over 25 years from very humble beginnings. Last winter I had to remove a few primary branches to allow more light into the canopy. Something that is a bit of a struggle with mature beech

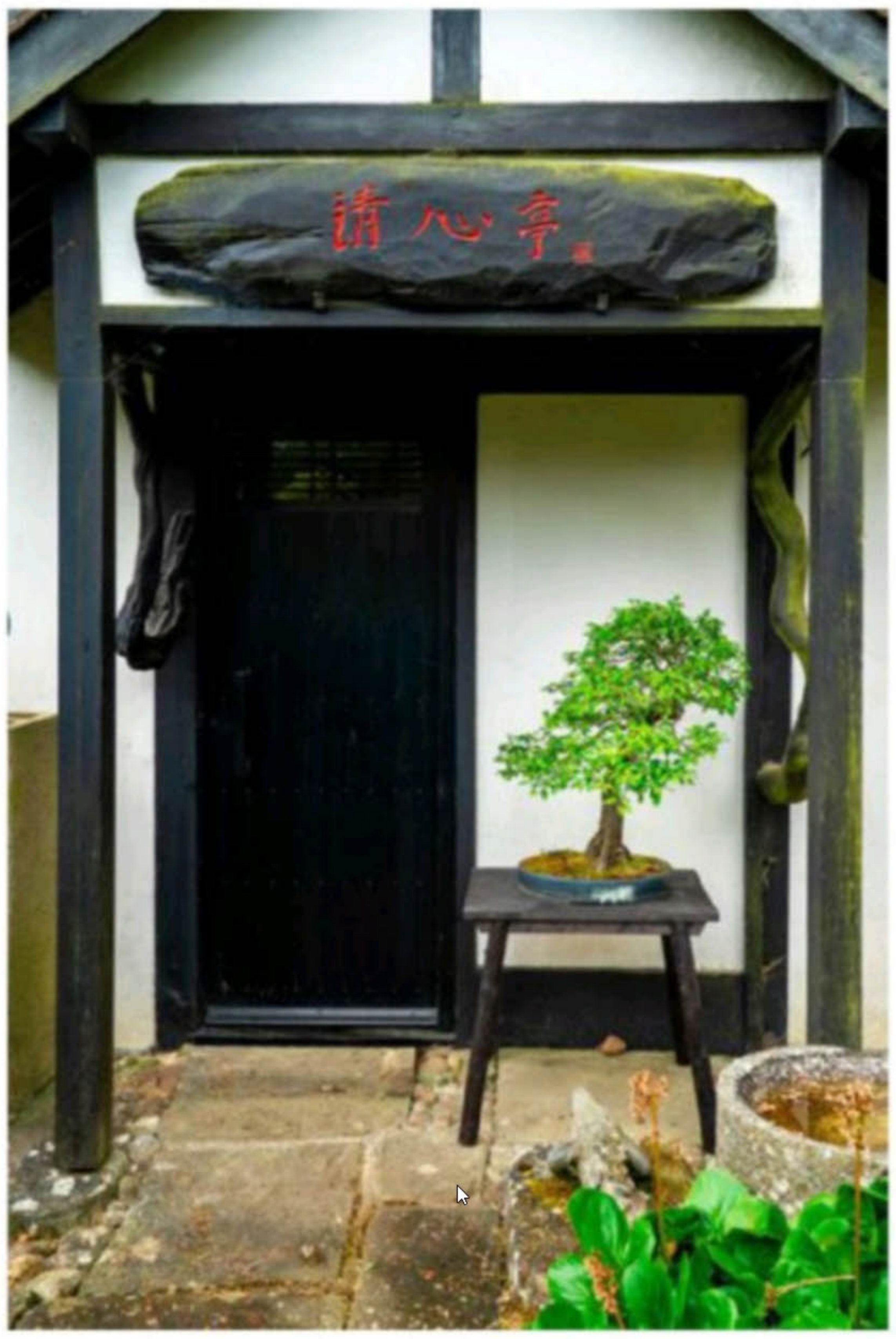


> ***For me, bonsai are part and parcel of a Japanese garden***

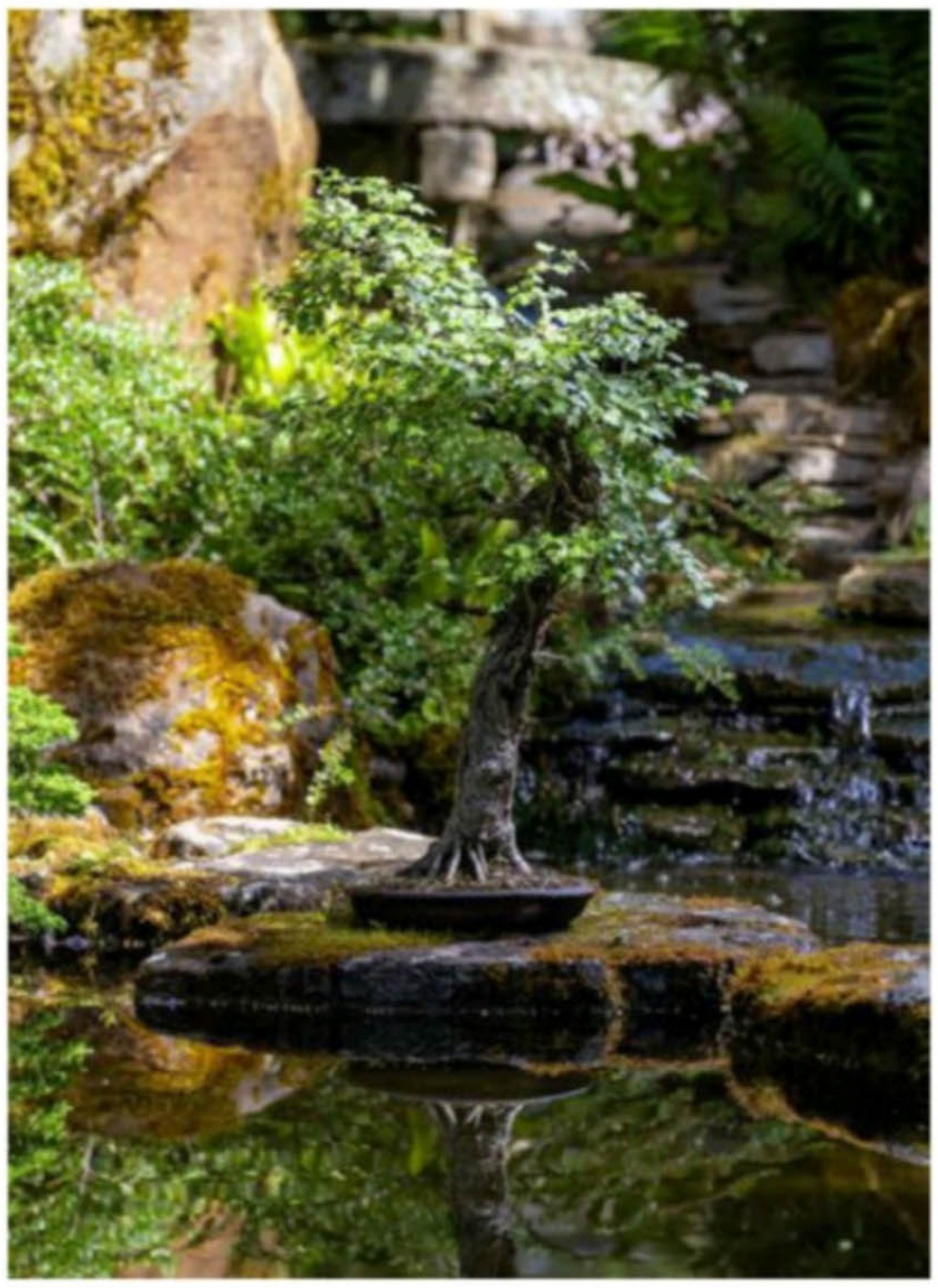
The beech seen from the left-hand side and with a background of the more mature Scots pines in the garden



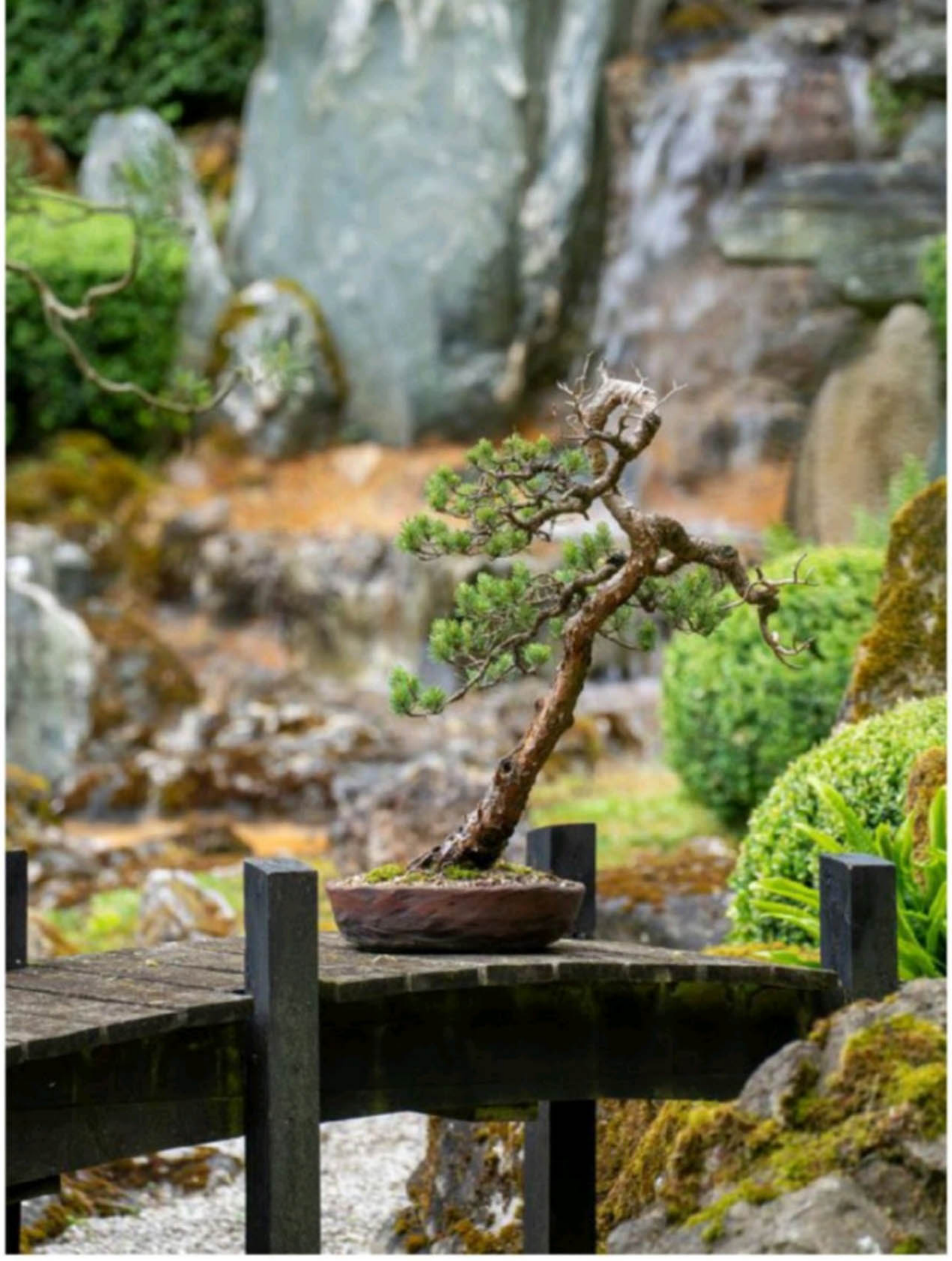
Carpinus betulus. *Pot: Victor Harris.*
My European hornbeam positioned on a small stone bridge over a stream, the plain black table elevates the bonsai so that it fits inside the striking background of a red torii gate, leading to a stone temple and two stone lanterns. The tree was originally simple field-grown material purchased from eBay in 2009 at which point I gave it a trunkchop and have been developing it since then



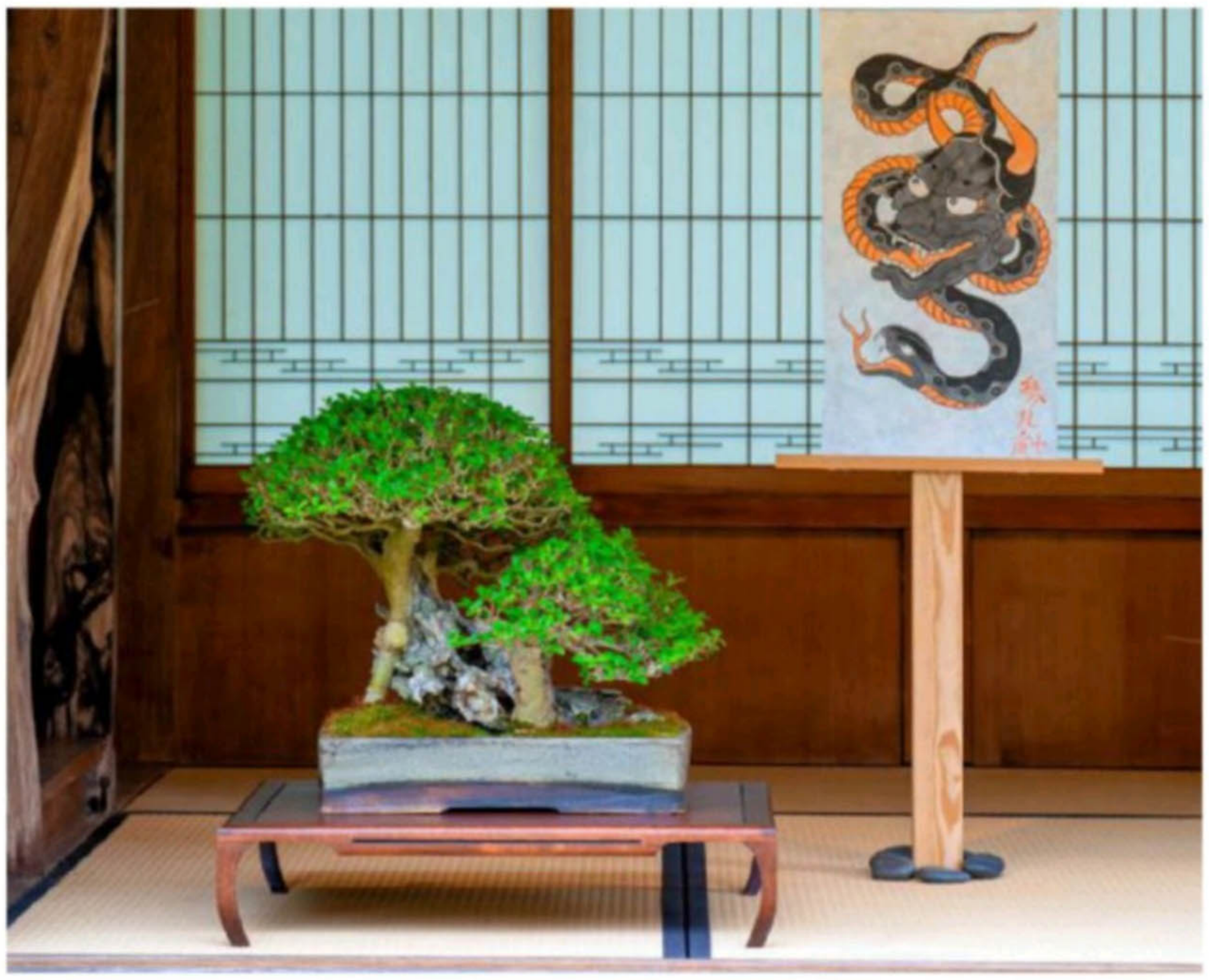
Prunus spinosa. *Pot: Victor Harris.*
A blackthorn yamadori displayed outside the front entrance of the Japanese cottage beside a traditional granite water bowl



Crataegus monogyna. *Pot: Ian Baillie*
I collected this common hawthorn bonsai from a hill in 2018. It had been growing in the lee of a much larger tree, but had somehow survived decades of competition in the wild.
Since collection, it has gone from strength to strength and is one of my favourite hawthorns. Currently planted in an Ian Baillie nanban that really suits it well.
The tree is seen here on a stepping stone crossing a koi pond in the garden, with a small waterfall behind

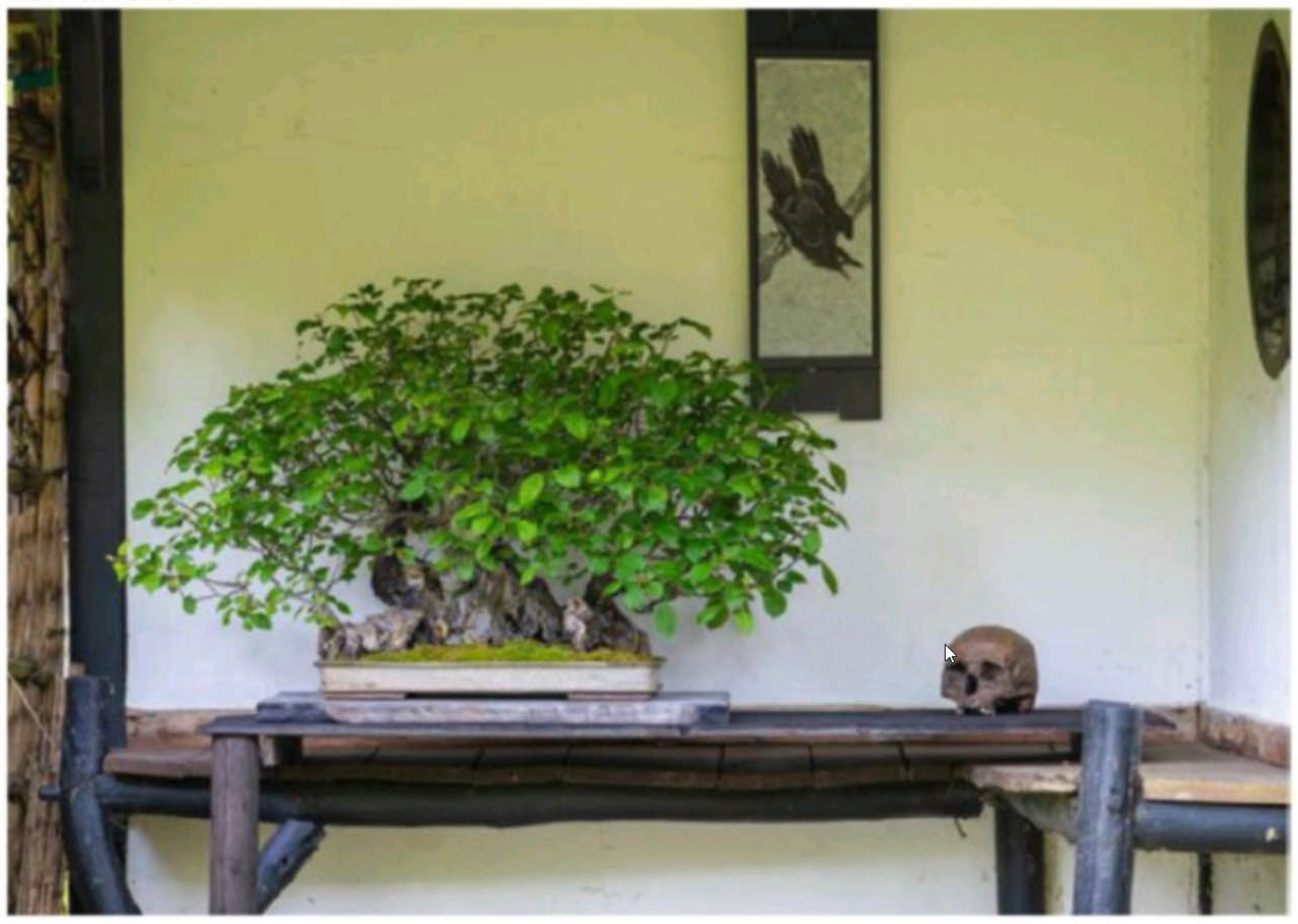


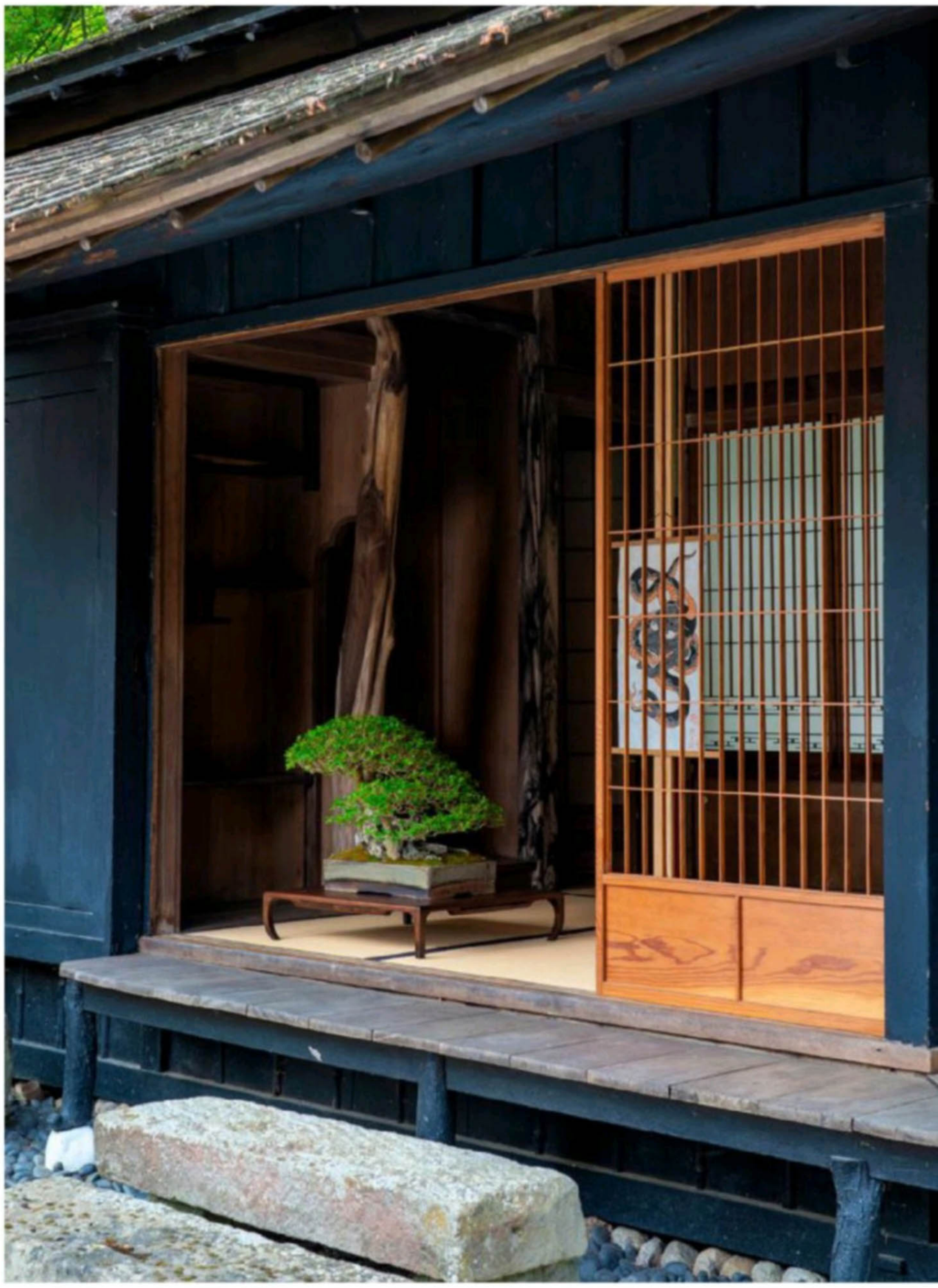
Pinus sylvestris Beuvronensis/Beuvronensis. *Pot: Esther Griffiths*
Displayed simply, on a wooden bridge over the dry river bed



Ligustrum vulgare. *Pot: Victor Harris*
I decided to make a more formal display for this area, featuring my common privet bonsai on a table by David Harris and accompanied by a watercolour scroll by his son Michael Harris.
The privet was collected from an old hedge in Wales in 2004 and has been in development with me since then

Malus sylvestris. *Pot: John Pitt*
My crab apple raft bonsai, placed in a small tea house. This was a repeat of a display I created for a recent UK Show, using a scroll by Michael Harris and a human skull





Right: This magnificent tea house originally stood in a garden in Japan before being disassembled, shipped to the UK and reassembled in the early 1900s. Featuring sliding screens of rice paper and wooden lattice, the house also features a tokonama just inside, on the left

Devil is in the Details

Marco Invernizzi and Andrés Bicocca work on a large juniper

Text and photography: Bonsai Focus Studio

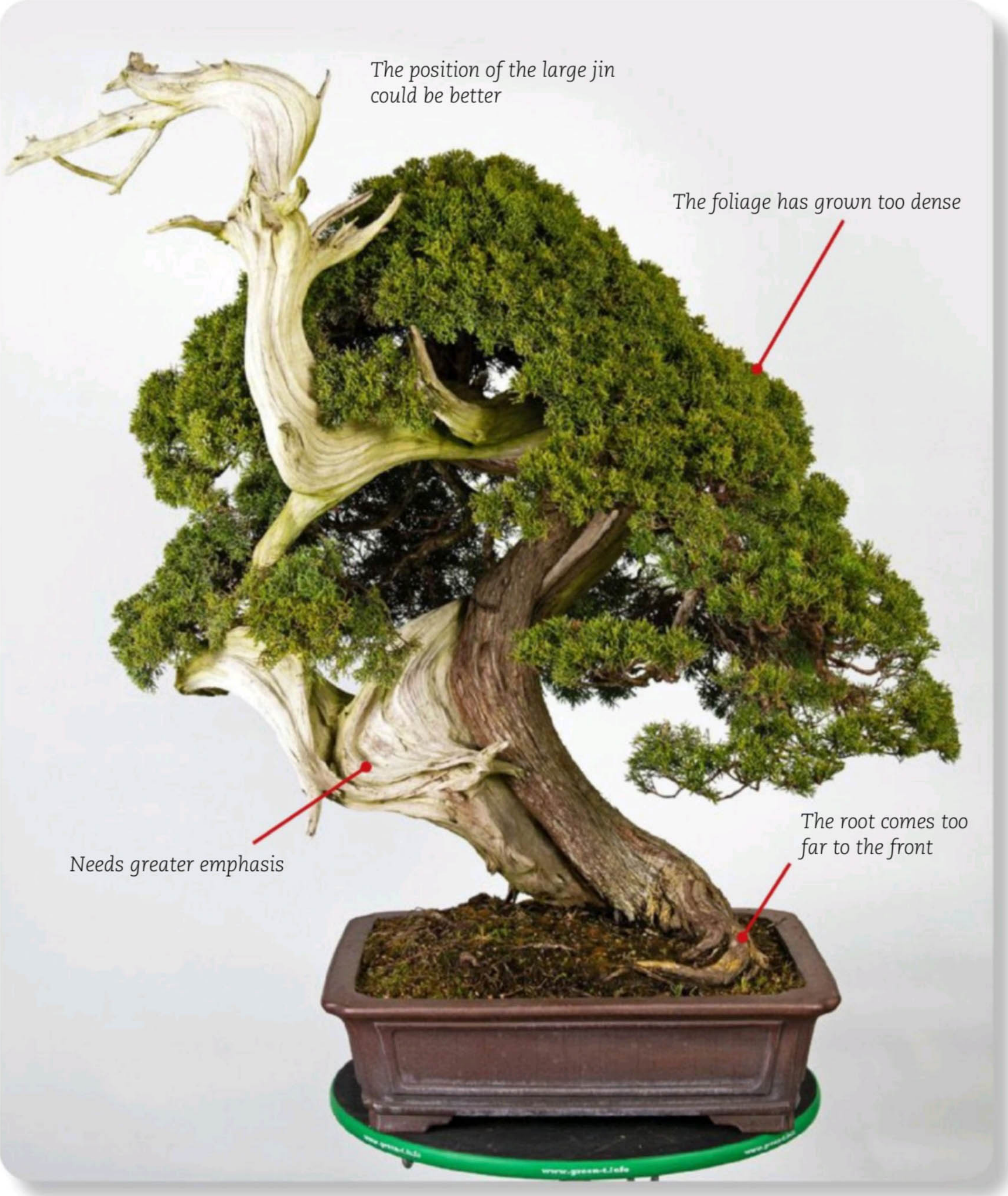
Andrés and Marco work closely together, in brotherly fashion, on a very old yamadori juniper from the Bonsai Plaza collection. Their goal is to improve the tree and to respect the work done by other artists before. However, during the process they prove the saying that the devil is in the details

This is an old yamadori juniper from Japan, with the Itoigawa variety grafted.

Marco's analysis: 'This project is a team effort and our aim is to improve the tree, not to change it completely. However, there is still a lot to do and it's all about refinement and optimising the appearance of this tree.

First, we need to change the front of the tree slightly because the top jin points towards the viewer. It will look better when movement is more to the side. By doing so, the view of the nebari will also improve. Sometimes, the best view of the nebari may be lost, but in this case the ugly root on the right is distracting. By turning the tree anti-clockwise you will improve the view of the nebari, gain a better flow in the trunk and also position of the jin and shari. These may seem to be minor things, but they can improve such a large tree. Marco states that 'it will make it less static and more dynamic, which will do justice to the impressive deadwood, too. Work on the deadwood is all in the hands of Andrés, the overall design of the tree will be my task.'

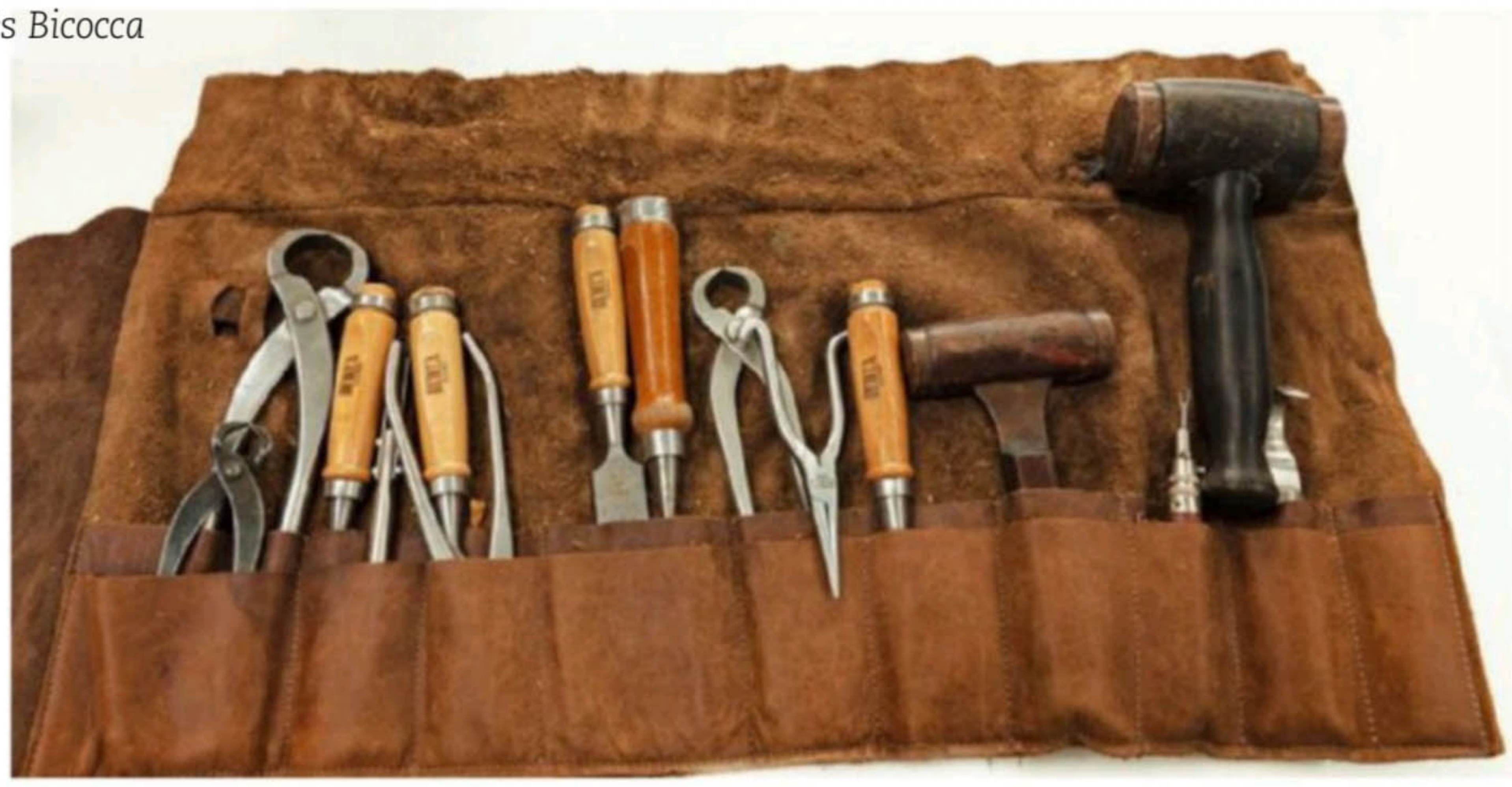
The situation before the work, a magnificent tree; however, there are some points to improve

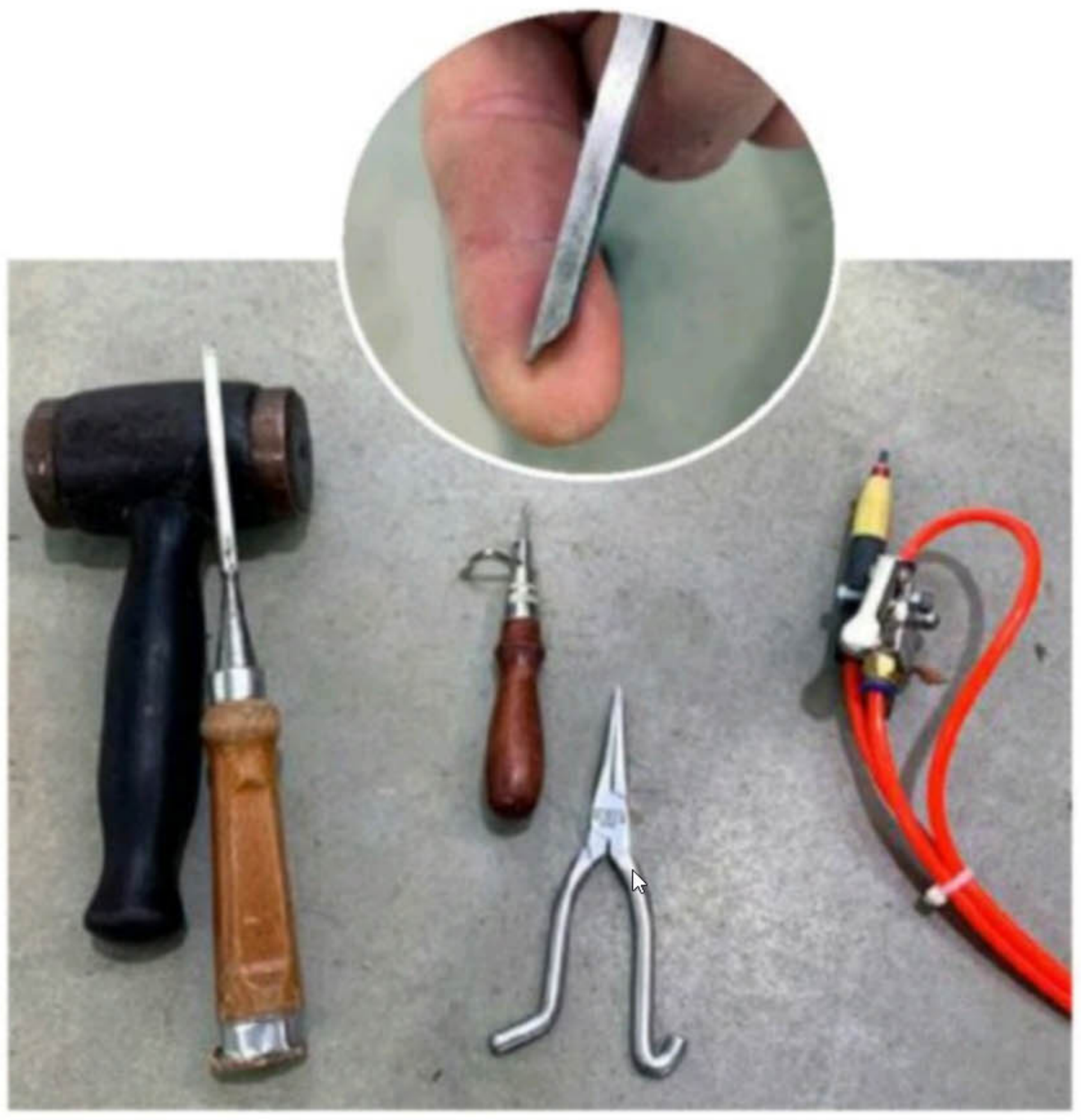

The position of the large jin could be better
The foliage has grown too dense
Needs greater emphasis
The root comes too far to the front

Starting with the deadwood

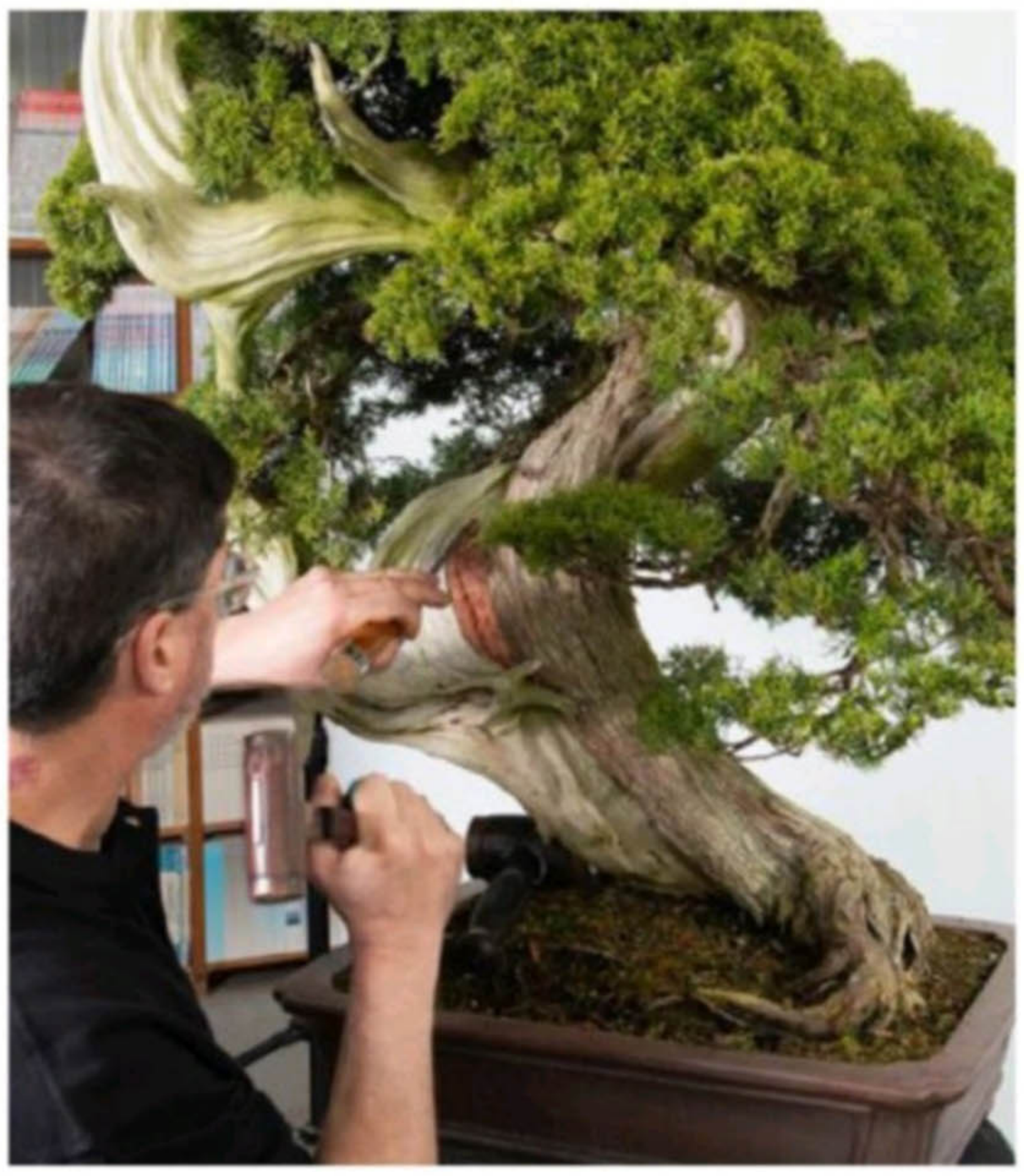
The carving process Andrés applies consists of three steps.
First step: Using the hammer and chisel for the general work. Second step: For more refinement I use my own design tools like the fibre lifter and pliers. Third step: The deadwood is sandblasted to give it its real natural look and remove all man-made scars.

The tools of Andrés Bicocca

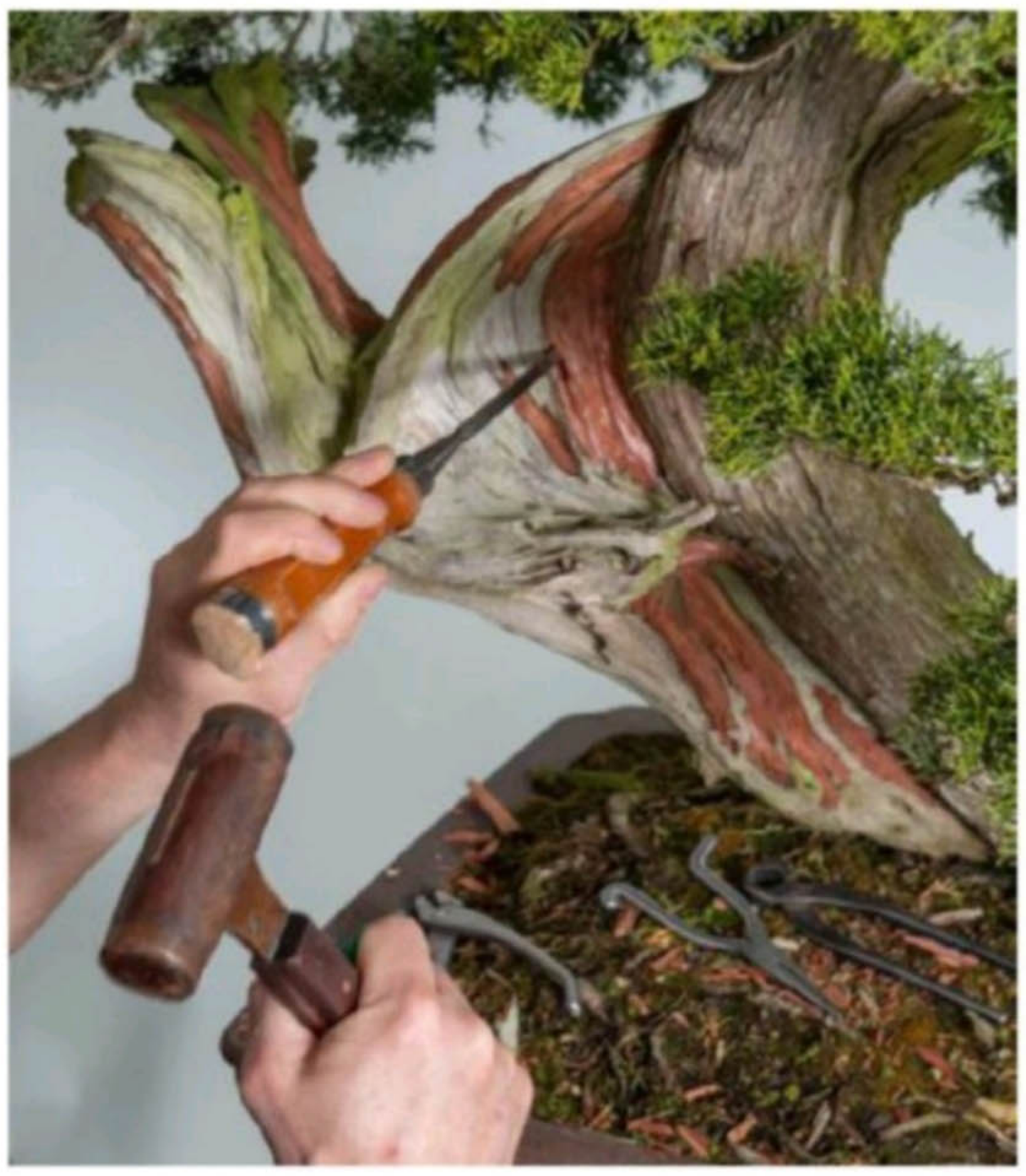




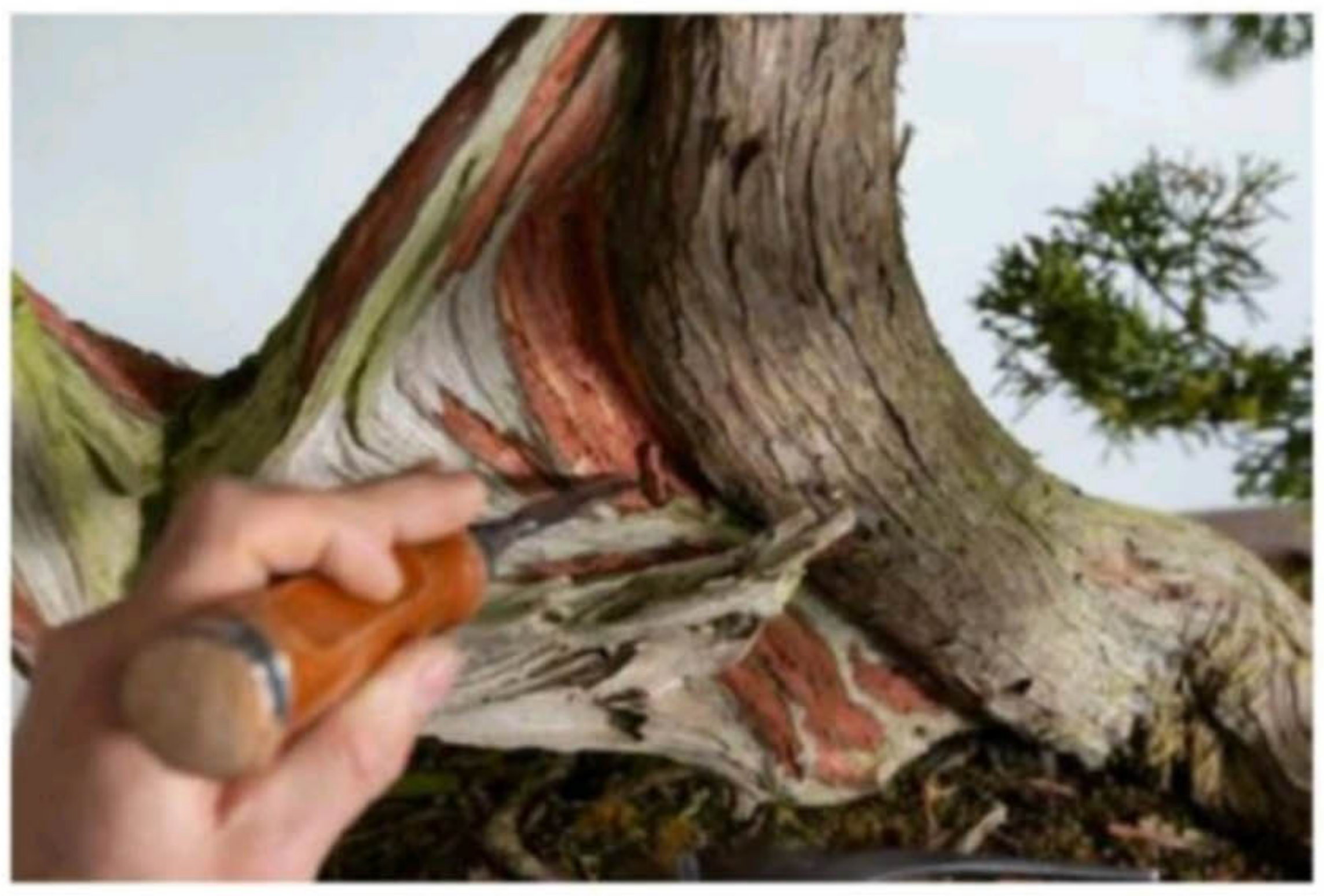
A selection of tools which Andrés is going to use for this project. From left to right, hammer and chisel, a special fibre lifter or scraper, pliers to pull small flints of wood and, designed by Andrés as well, his sandblaster bit. The chisel has a flat end which helps to carve in a more curved way



Andrés starts by carving the large middle section of the deadwood using a hammer and chisel



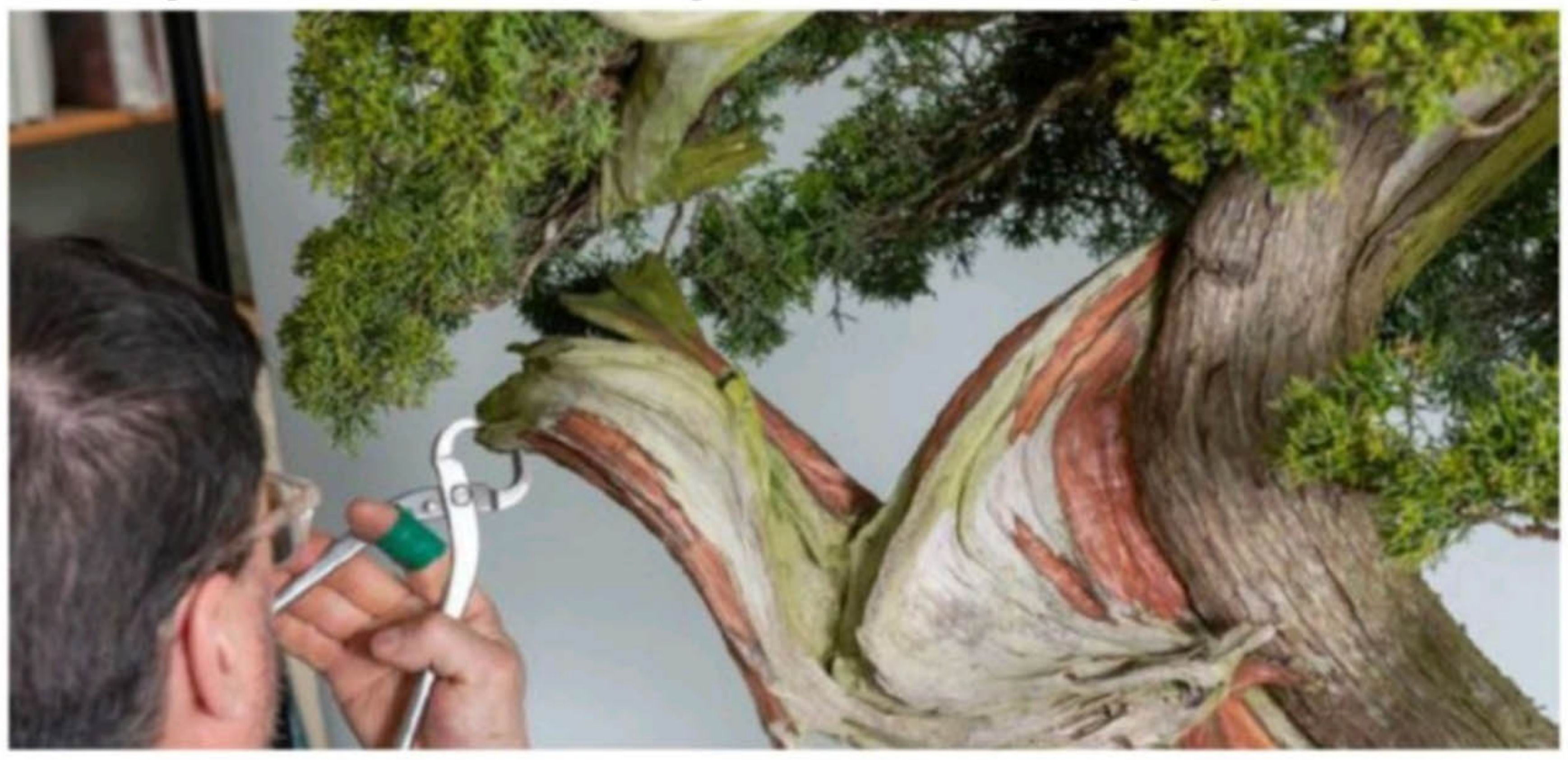
Removing the old carving traces so that the shari's surface will look more natural



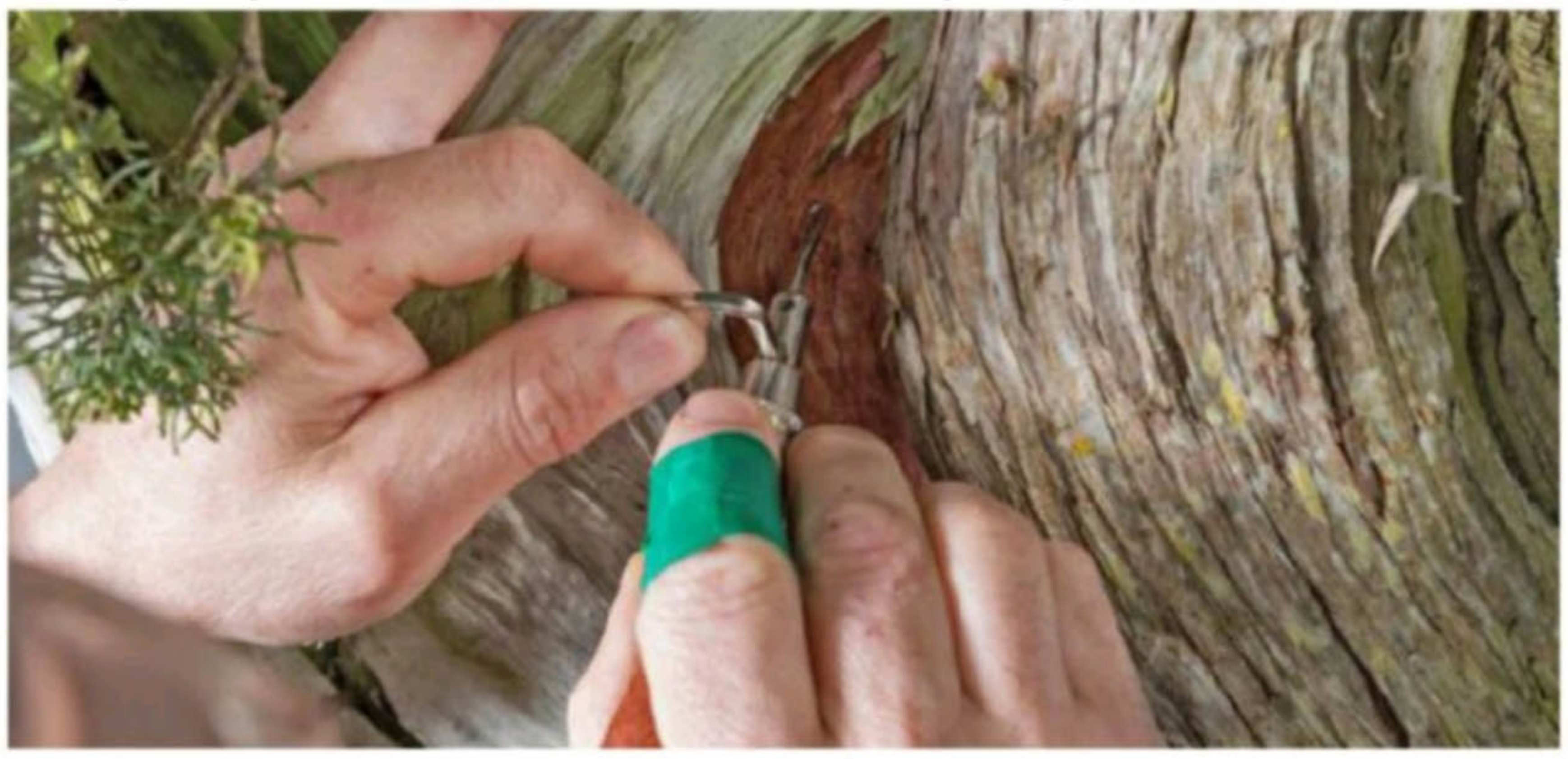
This section is made slightly deeper to emphasise the curve in the live vein

Carving the middle section of the shari

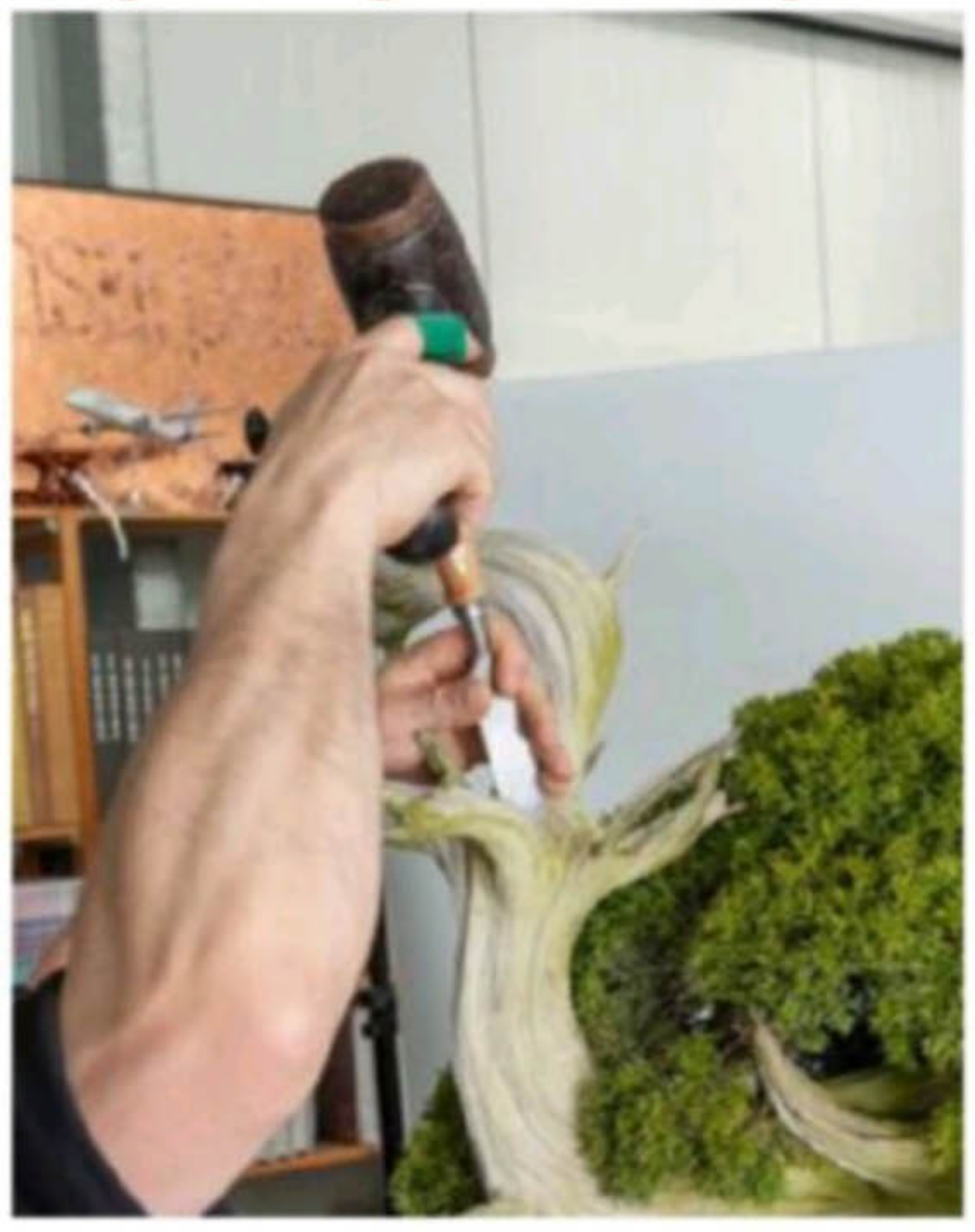
A small portion will be carved to emphasise the movement going to the back



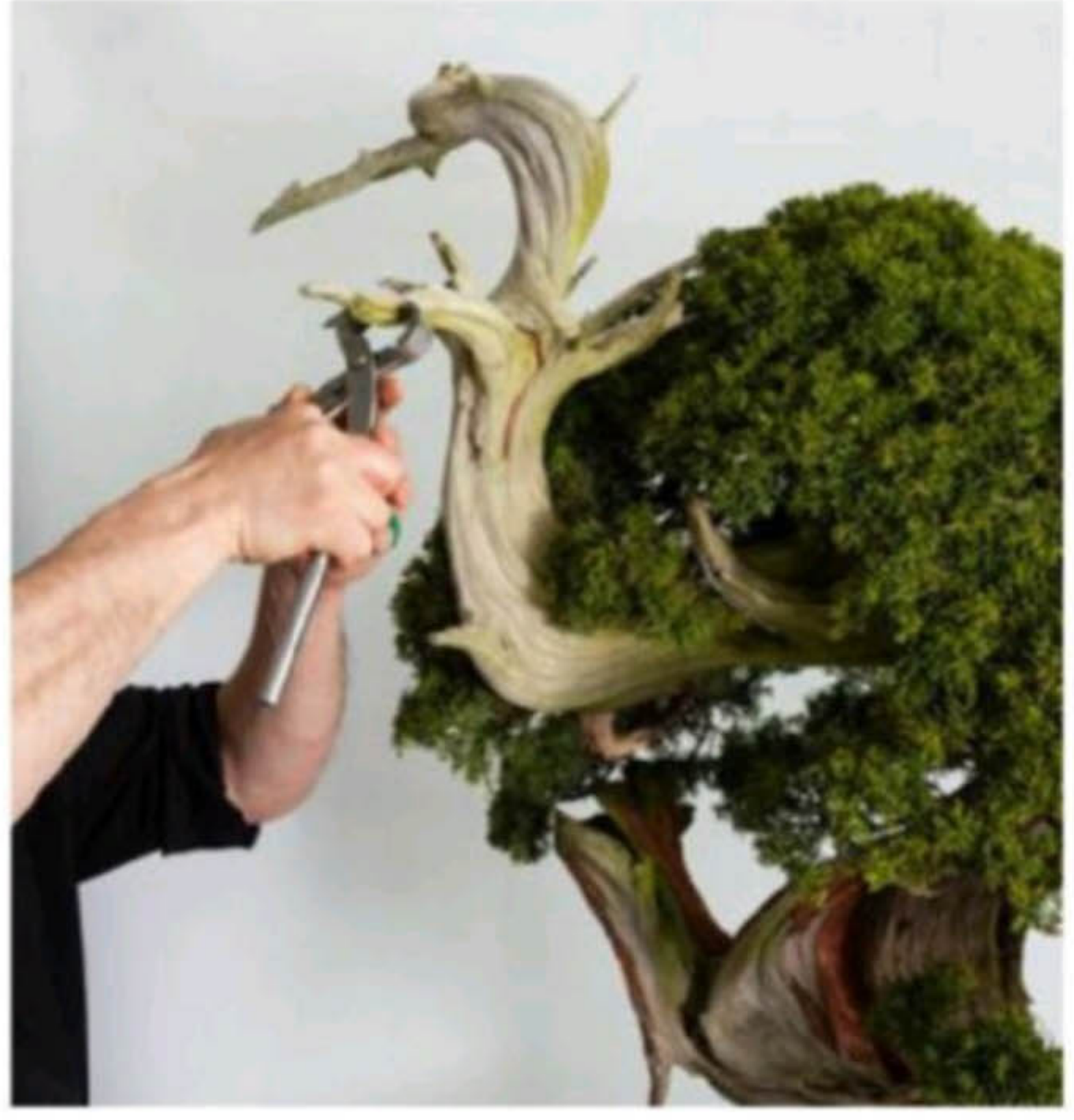
Fine splints of wood can be carved with the small fibre lifter



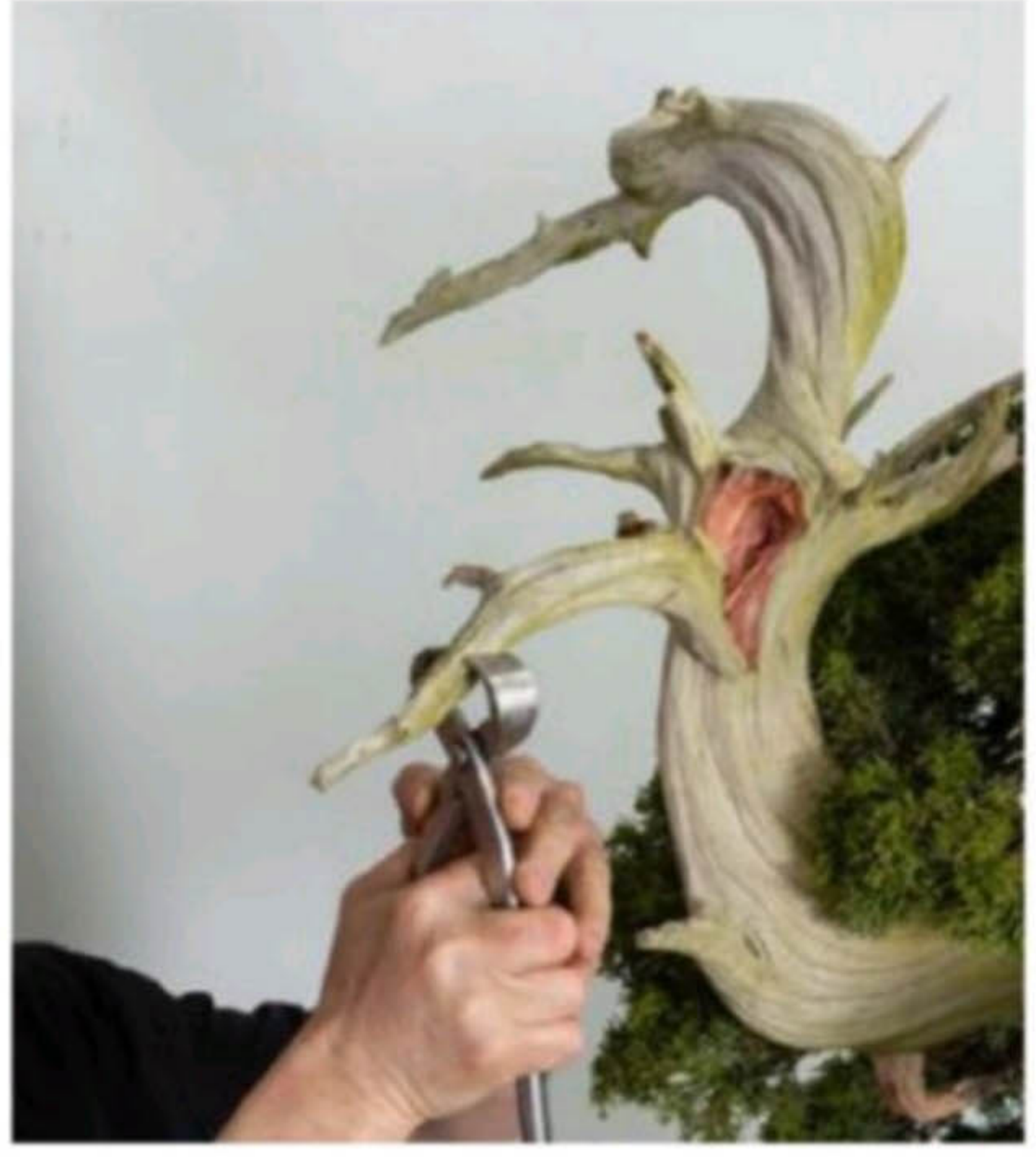
Adjusting the top jin and shari



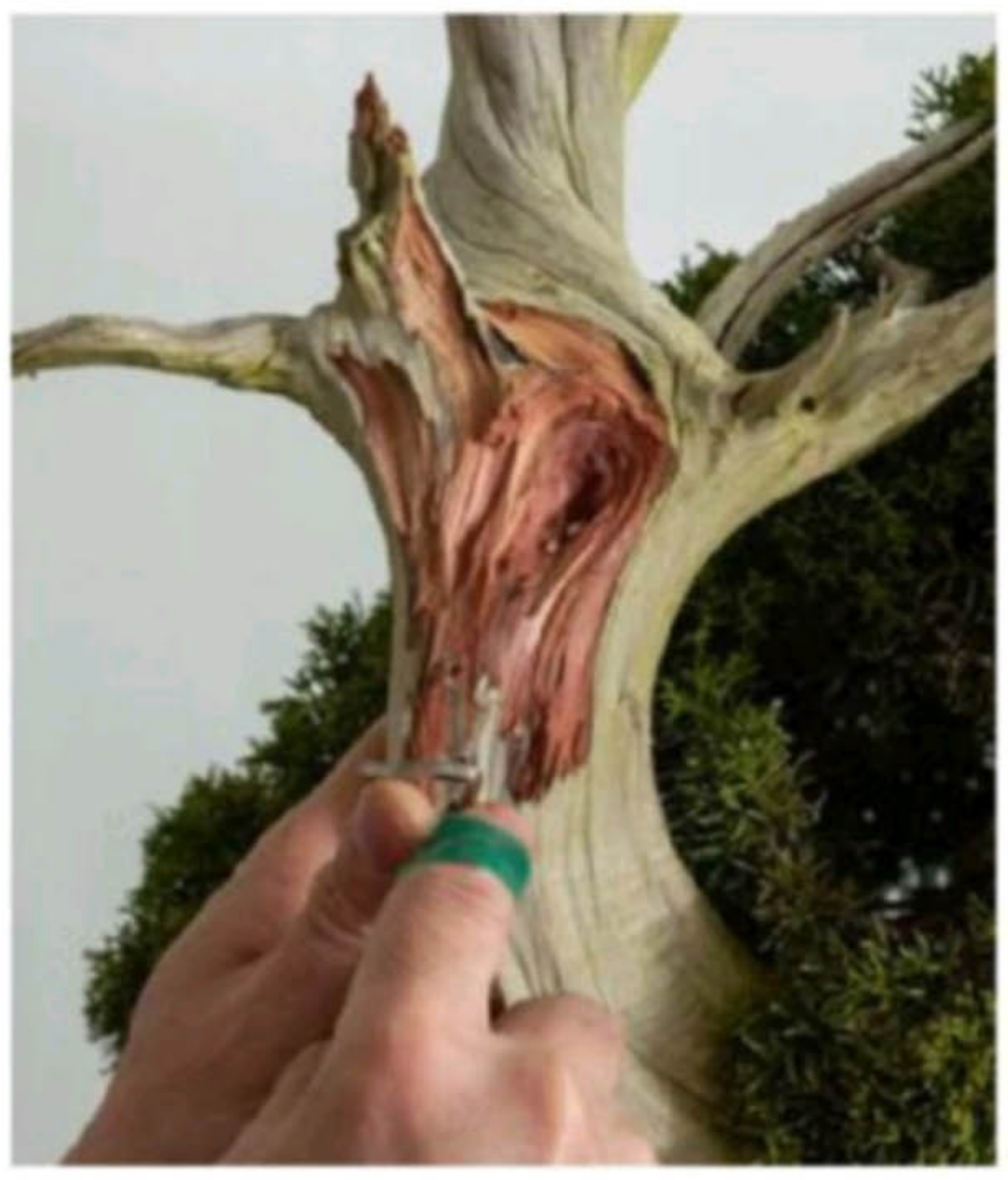
The top jin is too strong and needs to be adjusted. I use a chisel to make an incision



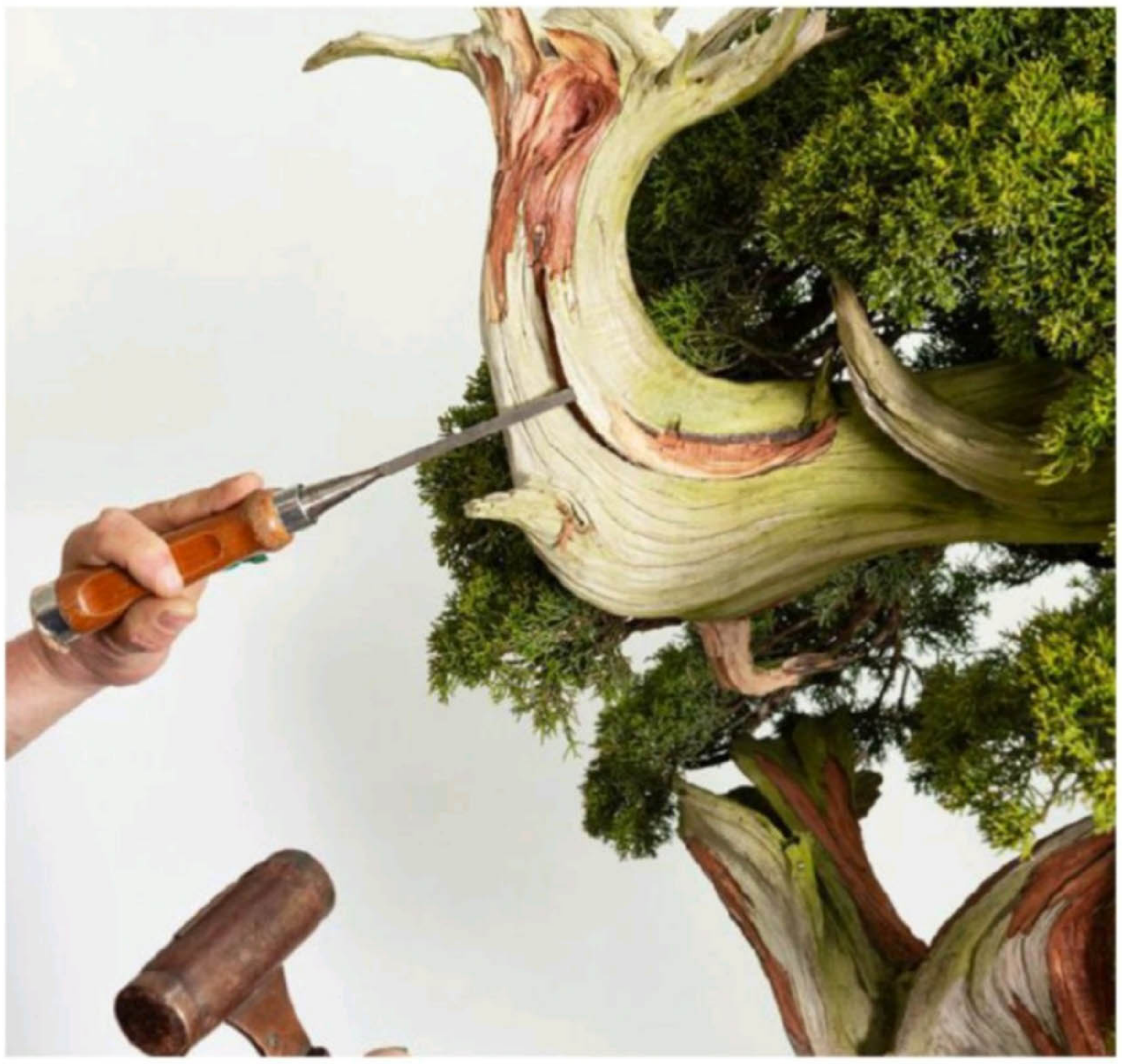
With a branch splitter, I remove the jin



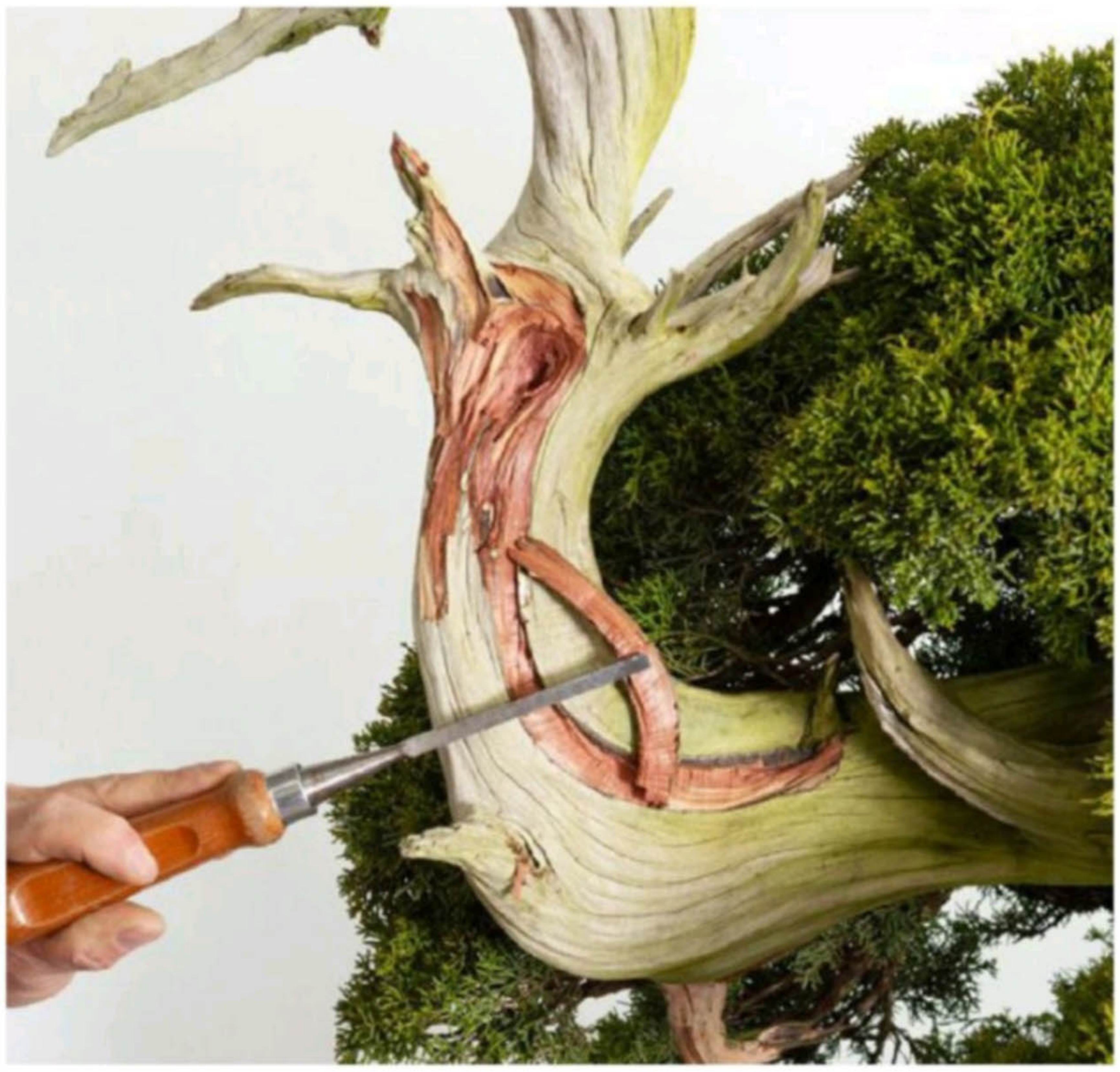
The entire piece is torn off



After removal a cavity has formed

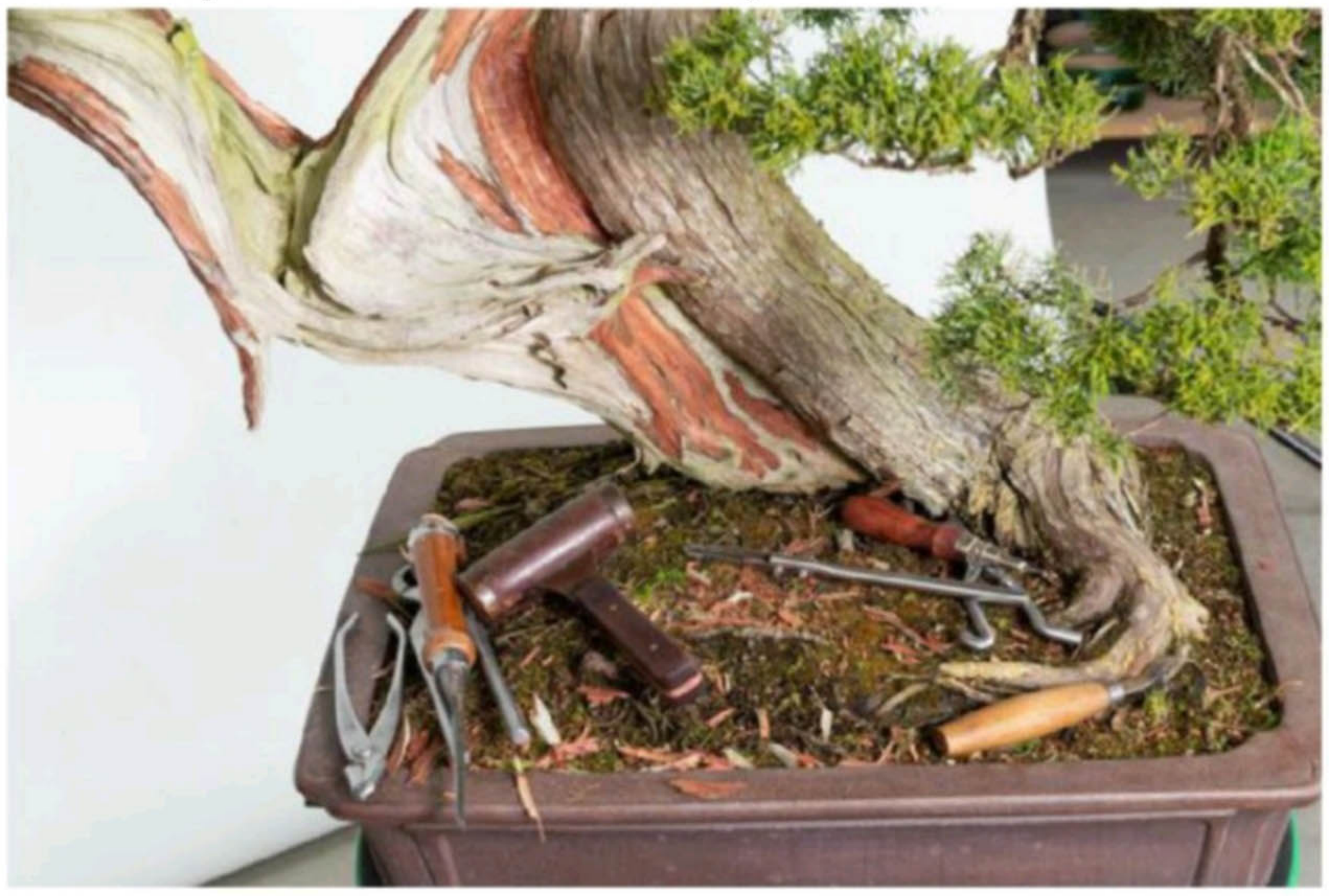


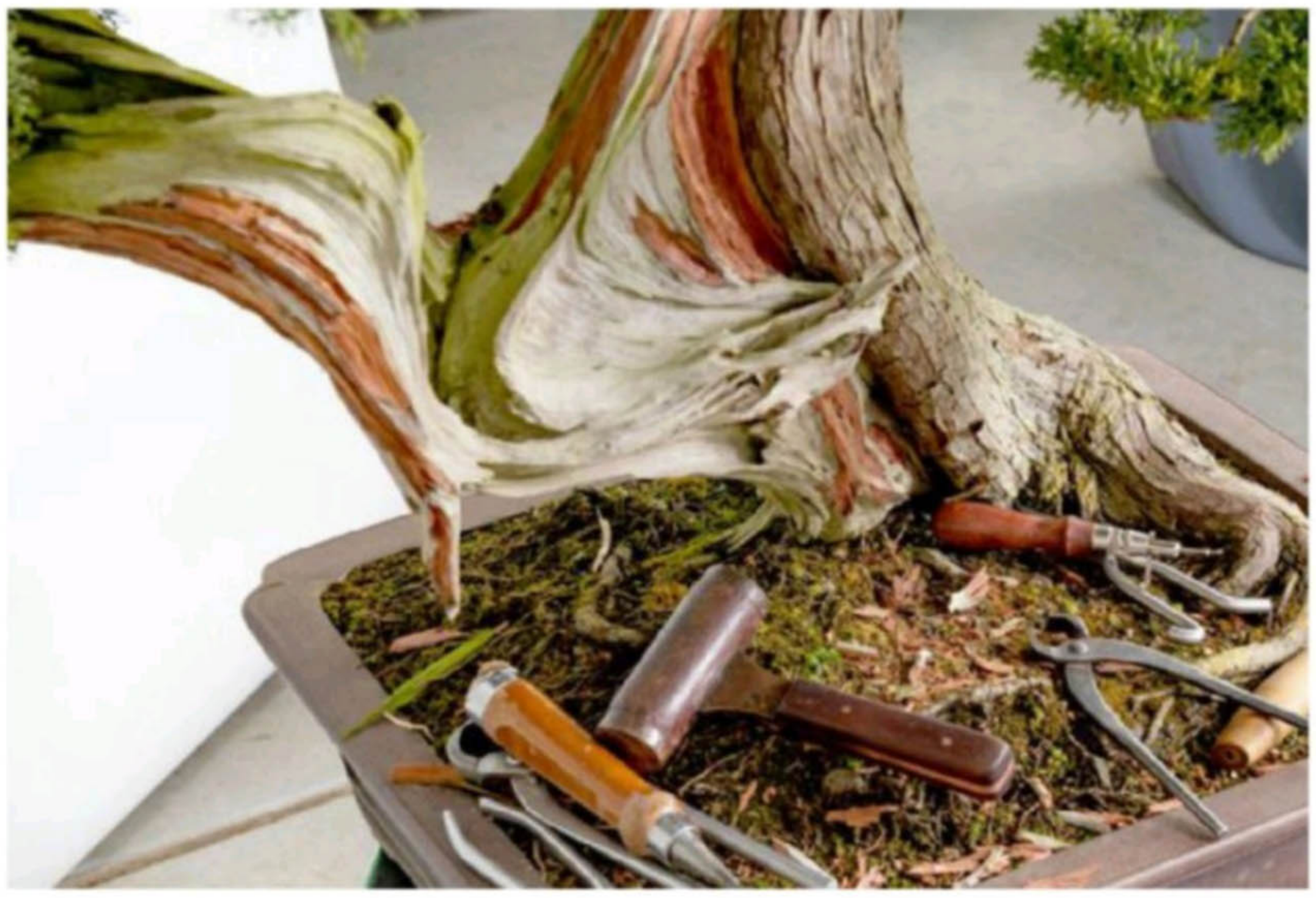
A large section comes off



I try to create a more interesting structure in this large section of the shari

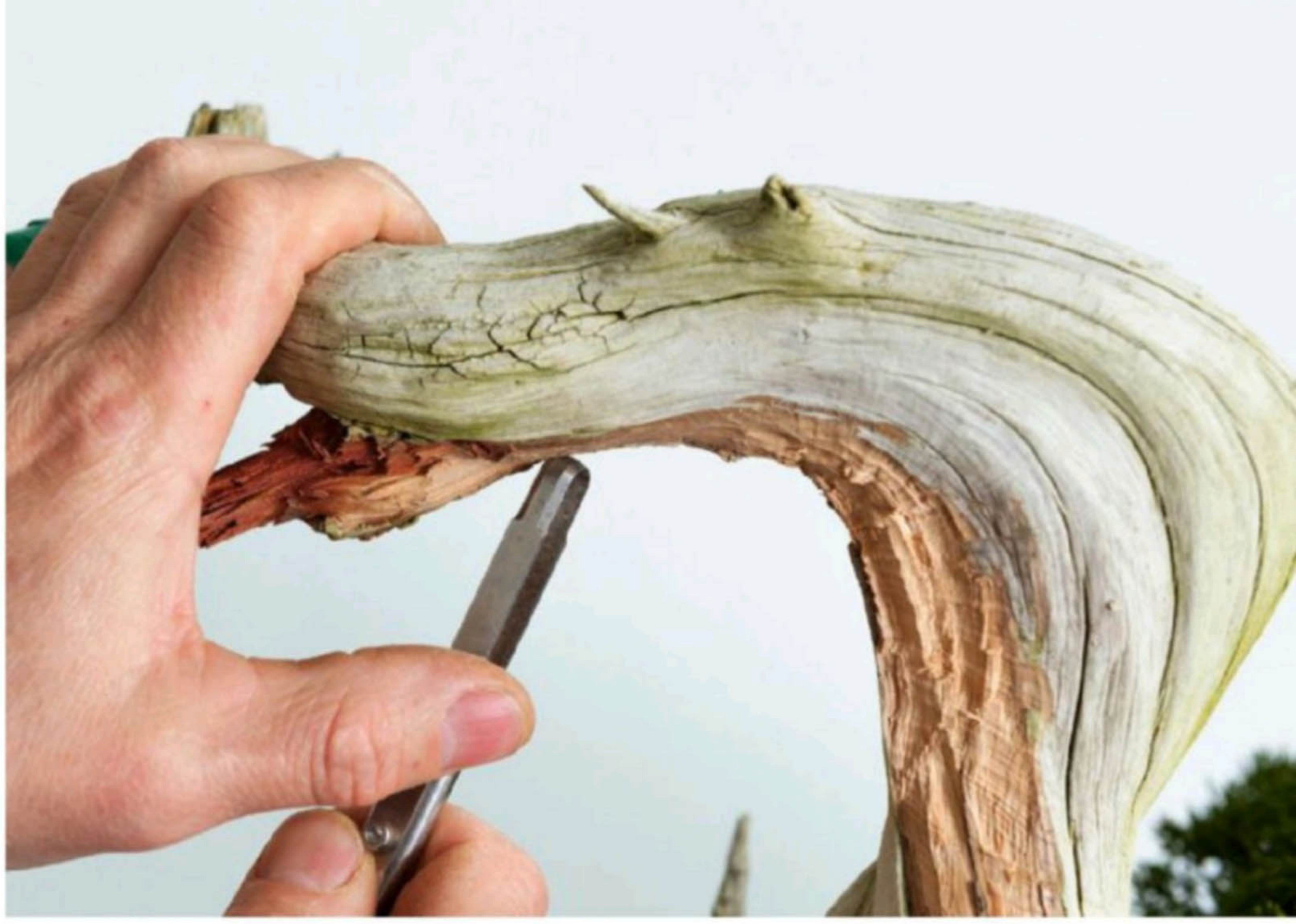
The reddish parts show where I made some adjustments



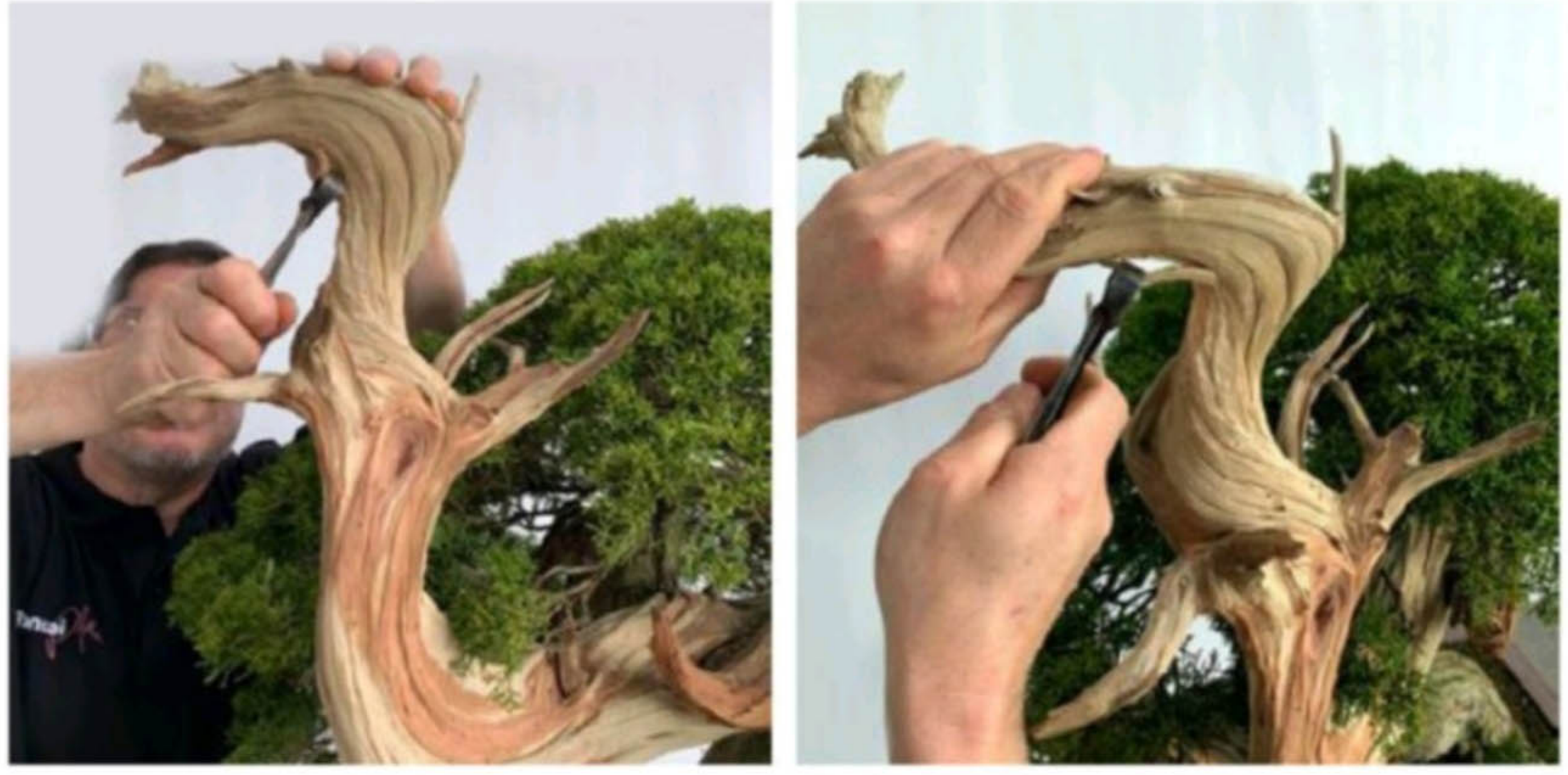


Improving the curvature

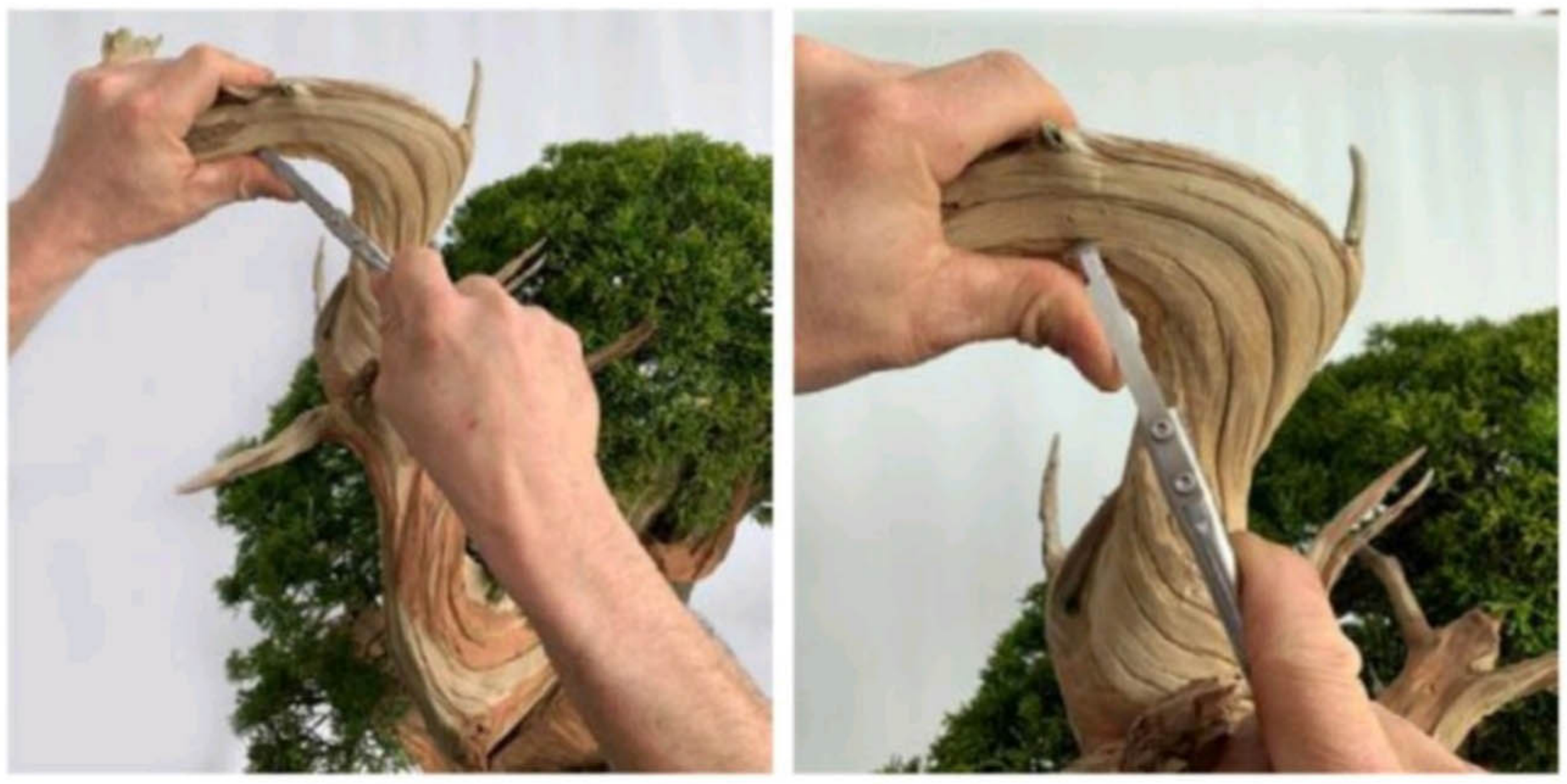
Marco explains that the top section of the jin needs some adjustment, too. It looks too heavy now that he has adjusted the front. A small part of the wood needs to be removed to improve the curve and to make it look slimmer



Andrés starts by carefully nibbling at some of the wood



Getting more confident, he removes a larger section

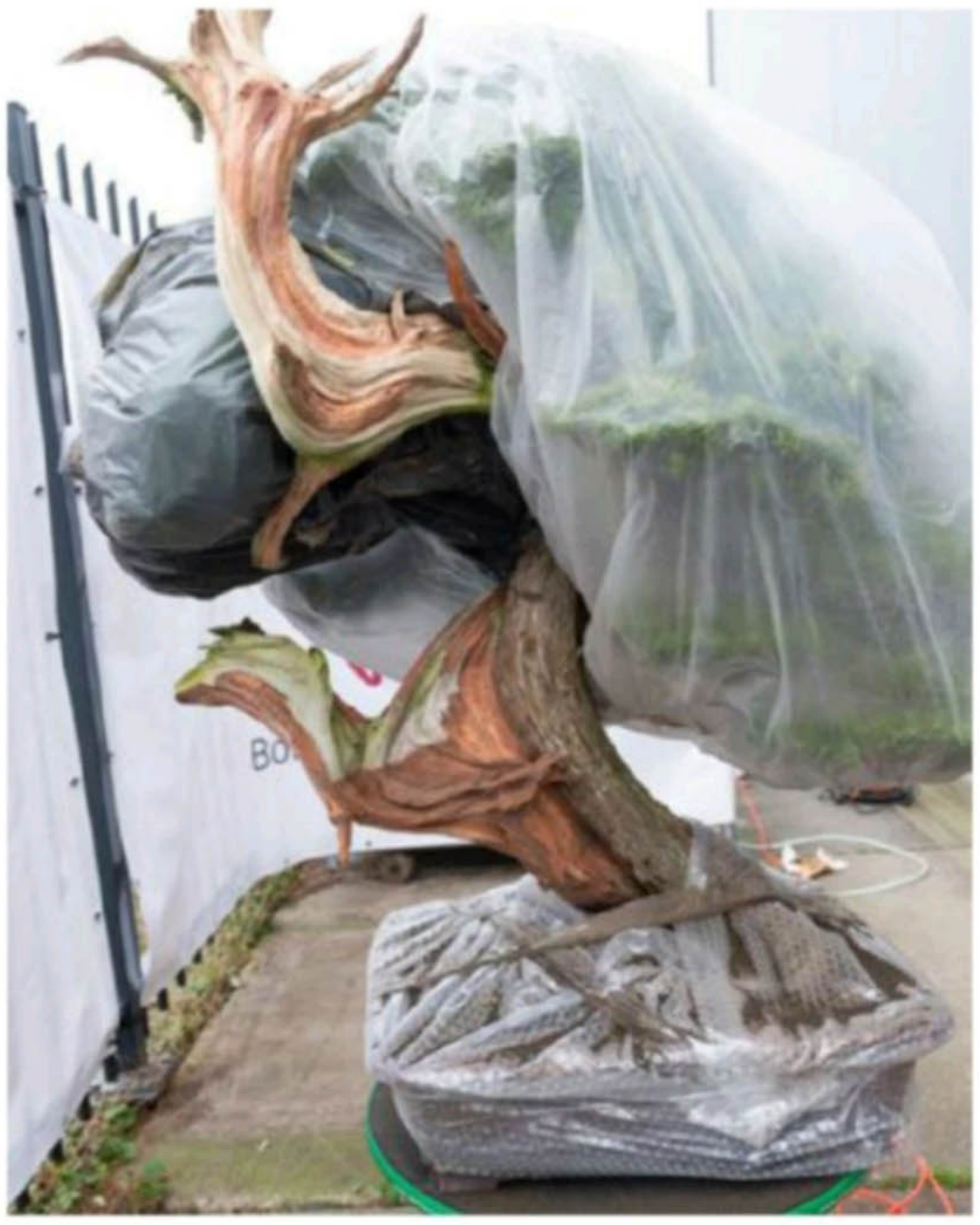


Using one of Andrés' designed tools to refine and smooth the cut area

The final step: Sandblasting

Sandblasting with, in this case, a machine that uses 6 bars of pressure, an aluminium silicate of 0.08 mm diameter and a ceramic nozzle. Because of the immense pressure and the aluminium sand, the harder fibres are being exposed, creating the weathered surface seen on trees in nature.

The tree's foliage is wrapped in protective cloth to avoid damage during the sandblasting



It is then brought outside where Andrés has his sandblasting gear ready. Meticulous work that takes quite some time

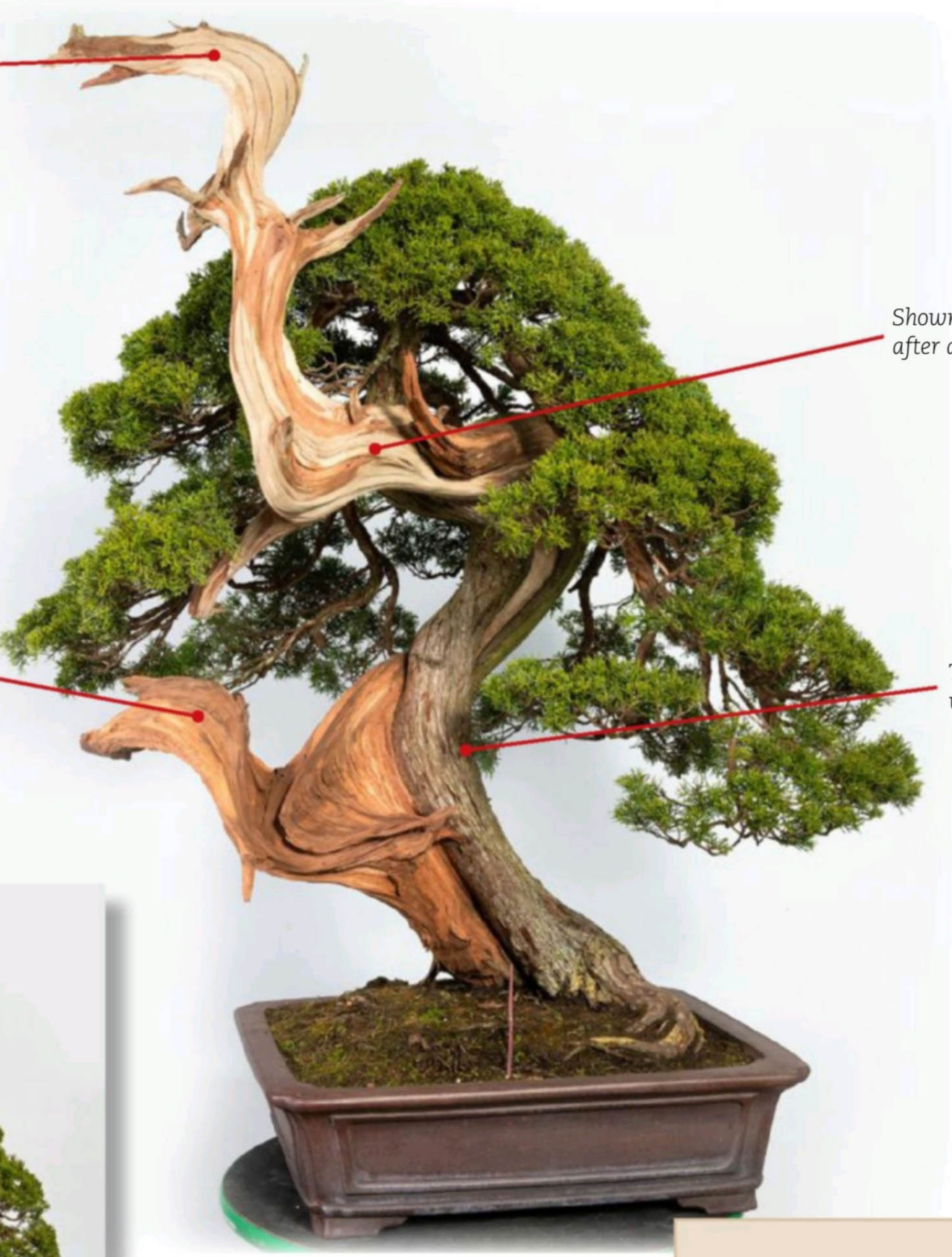
Bonsaiplaza.c

After sandblasting

Even after sandblasting, Andrés is not yet happy with the result, so some further adjustments are made

Some areas still need to be made a bit deeper to smooth the wave-shaped deadwood

Once again, his small carver comes into use



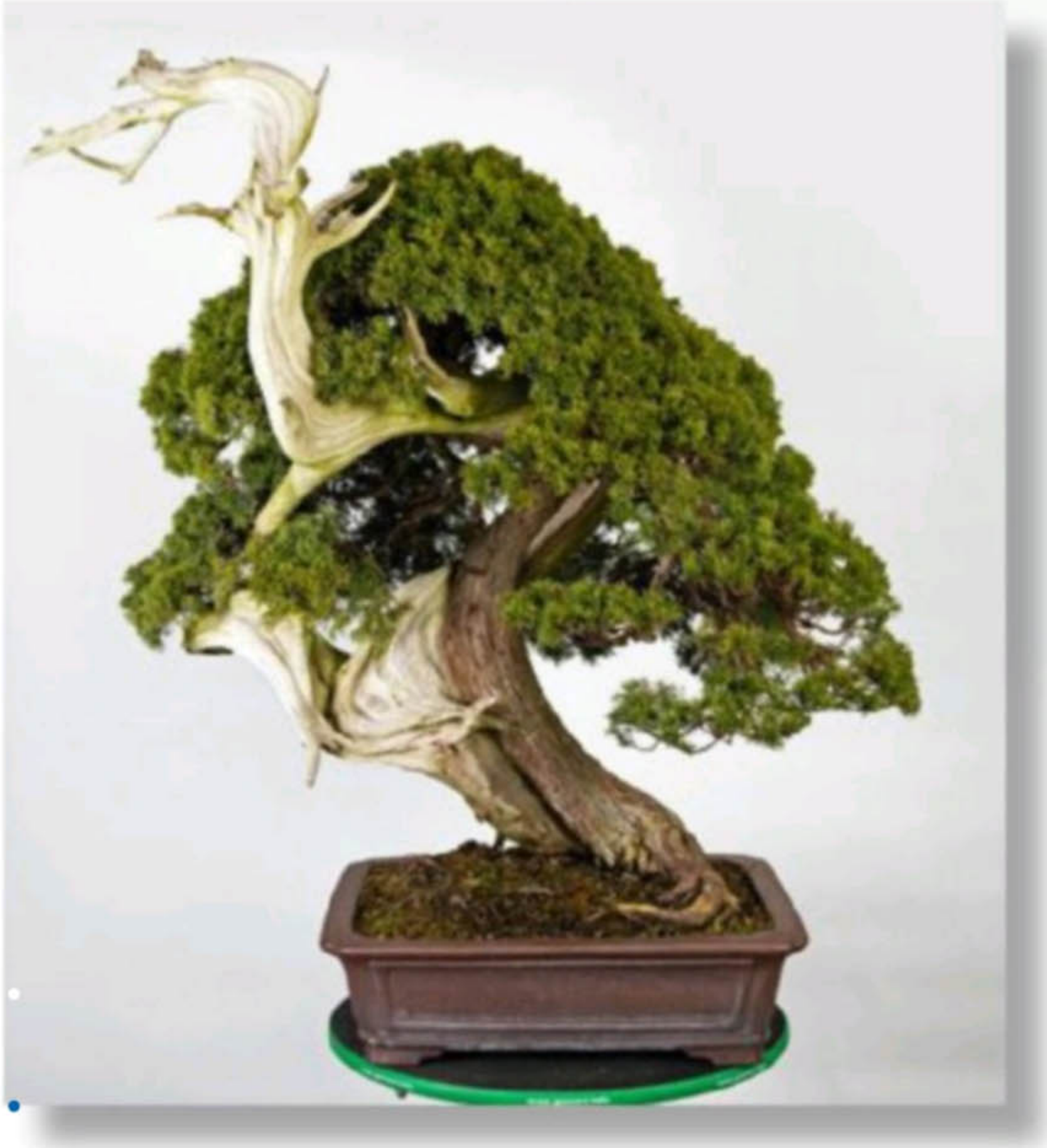
The top jin looks shorter, too

Shown from the new front and after adjustments, it looks thinner

The new front offers a better view of the shari

The flow of the trunk and live vein looks more elegant

To compare the situation before work



To be continued . . .

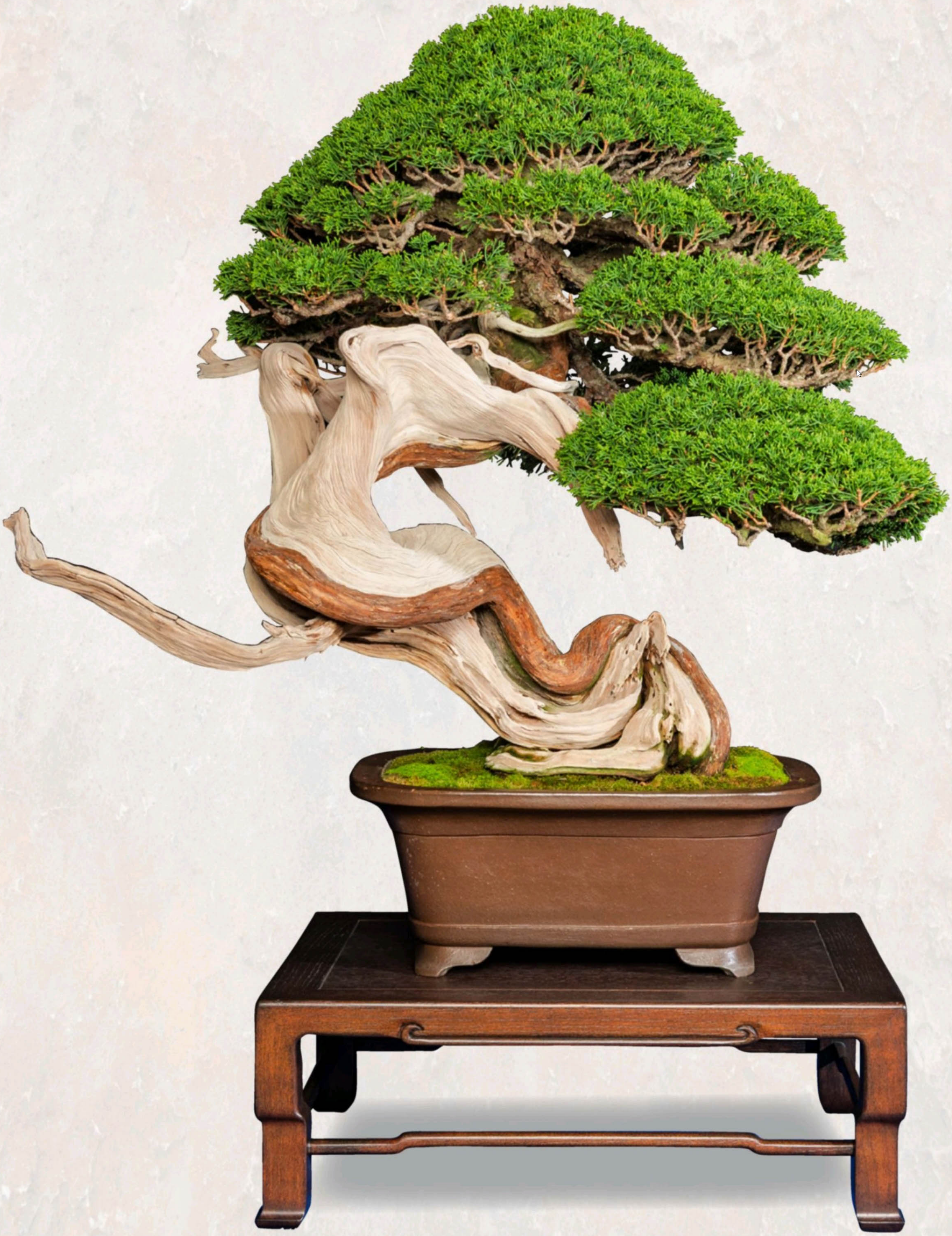
For now, the work on the deadwood has been finished. Refinement on the branch setting and further work will be carried out next spring by Marco Invernizzi.

Photos:Bonsai Focus Studio

Fagus crenata
Taiko Kanazawa

Pot
Sabine Besnard

Shohin: Malus domestica
pot: Fuka, Owner: Takeo Saiki.



Juniperus Itoigawa
German Gomez Soler

Look Mum, just like a real little tree

The bonsai passion of Ivo Santos

Text: Bonsai Focus Studio. Photography: Ivo Santos

A little Carmona triggered Ivo Santos' love for bonsai. Learning through trial and error, he finally jumped in the deep end, and left his business to fully concentrate on bonsai

Your professional education?

I worked in architecture and interior design for almost 10 years. After that period, I launched my own retail business focused on small tech gadgets. In 2021, I left all behind to dedicate myself entirely to bonsai, founding 'Bonsaiteca', a bonsai atelier inspired by the image I carry with me from Japan. Our focus is on working with students across the three levels of apprenticeship: beginners, intermediate, advanced. We also create bonsai trees for clients, offer maintenance services, and guide private collections. In Portugal, we work with corporate services, too, such as team building (bringing hands-on bonsai workshops into companies in order to strengthen team spirit and also promote mental well-being), bonsai rentals (for events and brand activations). We offer sustainable corporate gifting (little bonsai trees as eco-conscious gifts for clients and events).

How did it all start?

In 2003, I received a simple 'carmona' bonsai as a gift. I've loved trees since I was a child, growing up in the country surrounded by forests. That little bonsai tree was of poor quality, but it triggered

something in me. I looked for information online, but sadly there was little available at that time, and so I bought The Bonsai Handbook by David Prescott. The most powerful idea I took from that book — beyond basic care — was the realisation that I could design and create my own bonsai, inspired by full-sized trees. That concept captivated me. My self-taught journey began here, collecting material and learning like most of us do — through trial and, mostly, error.

How did you acquire the skills?

In 2004, the bonsai community was very small in Portugal. But a few individuals from the local scene helped me during those early years — Jochen Graff, Carlos Brandão, and Viriato Oliveira. Quickly, I realised I needed to take things further, so I began attending workshops with the European artists like Luis Villa, Mauro Stemberger, Kevin Willson, and others. Among them was Mario Komsta who had a particularly strong impact on my development — his vision is unique, and he may well be the most complete bonsai artist in Europe, mastering horticultural techniques and the refined art of display. At Bonsaiteca, I continue to promote group workshops for advanced students, inviting different artists to share their knowledge — most recently Luis Villa, Germán Colmenares, and Andrés Bicocca.

Any plans to go to Japan?

This, in fact, took place in 2024, when I finally began a Japanese apprenticeship. It was a long-awaited step in my journey. From September to December 2024, I completed my first period of study under Master Taiga Urushibata at Taishoen. I'm especially drawn to shohin-sized trees, so Taishoen's history and Master Taiga's approach were a perfect fit. I also love shaping and designing trees, so Taishoen's dual focus on shohin and medium-to-large trees — particularly pines and junipers — made it the ideal place. Those three months were a dream come true, and I plan to return every year to continue my training.

> *Bonsai taught me the true meaning of time*

Your thoughts on bonsai

Over time, bonsai has become more than just an art form for me. It's a way of connecting deeply with nature — a daily mental and emotional practice. Technical skill alone is not enough; bonsai demands constant growth, introspection, and patience. It is where nature and human intention meet to create a slightly better version of the natural world.

Bonsai also taught me the true meaning of time. In a world obsessed with speed, and instant results, bonsai reminds you that everything meaningful requires time, dedication, and reflection. Beauty unfolds slowly. And that slowness is the beauty.

CV

Ivo Santos (44)

Born in: Porto, Portugal

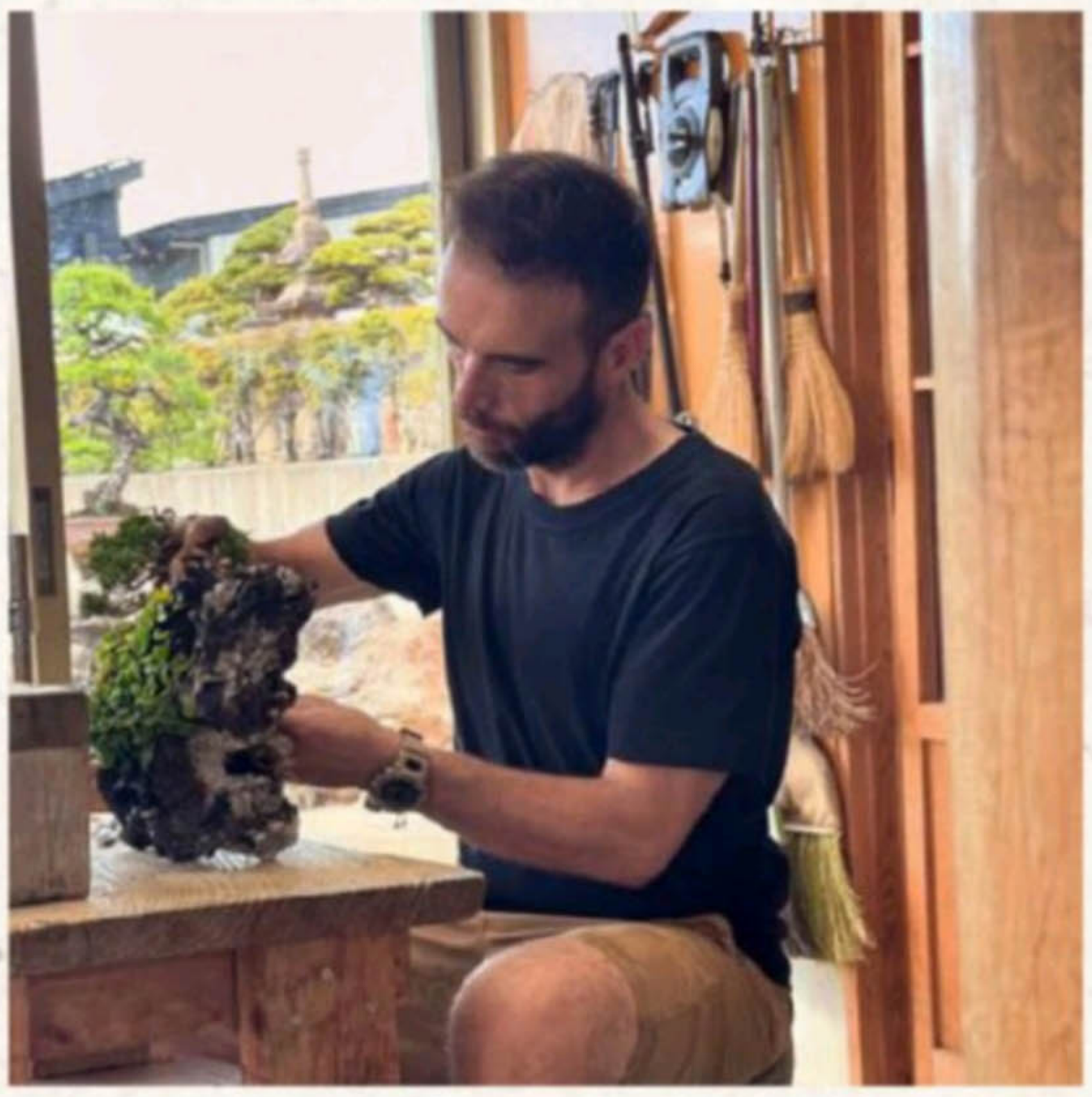
Partner: Eduarda Ribeiro

Education: Architecture

Profession: Bonsai Professional - Bonsaiteca

Into bonsai since: 2004

Favourite species: Pines, *Itoigawa* junipers, wild olives and *Myrtus.*



Any other interests or hobbies besides bonsai?

Yes, I love writing and keeping a journal — not just about my bonsai, but about life generally. It helps me organise my thoughts. I'm most passionate about volunteer work and am part of the TEDx-Porto organising team. Every year, we produce a major event with 16 speakers sharing ideas that can change the world. TEDxPorto welcomes 1300 participants annually and is among the top 20 TEDx events globally.

I also enjoy drawing and continue to improve my sketching skills whenever possible.

Which trees do you most like to work on?

I enjoy working with sun-loving species that tolerate shaping and all the design techniques — especially pines, *Itoigawa* junipers, wild olives, and *Myrtus*. Pines, in particular, are my favourite. I love the final silhouette of an aged pine, textured bark, and refined details of its deadwood and branch structure.

Do you have a favourite bonsai?

I deeply appreciate most of the trees in our private collection — that's why we keep them. But if I had to highlight one, it would be my *Myrtus communis* in chuhin size. It received a Mention of Honour at Crespi 2023 and won the Chuhin Bonsai Art Award at the Trophy 2025. Over the years, it has matured beautifully. It has been incredibly rewarding to watch that evolution.

Your worst mistake?

Waiting too long to go to Japan. As a Portuguese artist, I should have studied in Japan earlier. Learning the foundational philosophy and techniques of bonsai at its origin brings a depth of understanding that no book or workshop can replace.

What is your best achievement?

That's easy. A few years ago, we displayed trees at a local city event. I overheard two small children with their mother looking at the display. One said, 'Look Mum, it looks like a real little tree'. For me, it was the ultimate achievement — it's when someone knowing nothing about bonsai can recognise a tree in your creation. That's the true purpose. It's not about awards. It's about touching people, even just for a moment, with the image of nature.

Your dream comes true when...

We build a healthy bonsai community in Portugal. One valuing equality, humility, and focuses not on the ego of the artist, but on the tree itself. My dream will come true when we establish an open Bonsai Museum and Foundation — a space for everyone to experience bonsai. A space that promotes education, inclusion, and therapeutic work through the care of trees.

Do you favour the Japanese or Western bonsai style?

I'm Portuguese, so naturally, I create my bonsai with a European or 'Portuguese' touch. I believe your style is a reflection of all the influences you absorb — your environment, your teachers, your culture. I admire the classical Japanese school —

its minimalism and sense of order — but I also appreciate the naturalistic styles of Walter Pall, Andrija Zokic, and Ryan Neil from Bonsai Mirai. They capture the very essence of each species in a raw and authentic way.

At the same time, I love the bold and unconventional work of artists like Benoit Fabregas and Laurent Darrieux. They push the boundaries of design.

You have to stay open. You can't evolve in any art form without being open to all perspectives. All those influences become building blocks shape your unique voice.

How do you cope with your bonsai during summer heat?

Summers here can reach 36°C, while in winter may drop to -1°C. So seasonal care is essential. During summer, we use shade nets in key areas, place shohin in trays with soil beneath to preserve their humidity, and wrap larger pots with white towels to reduce heat absorption. It's clear to us that every summer is hotter than the last. Climate change is real. That's why every year we plan ahead for the summer — evaluating each detail, making corrections daily if needed, and always adapting to protect our trees.

> *The true purpose — when someone who knows nothing about bonsai can recognise a tree in your creation*

BONSAITECA

NOT MY TYPE

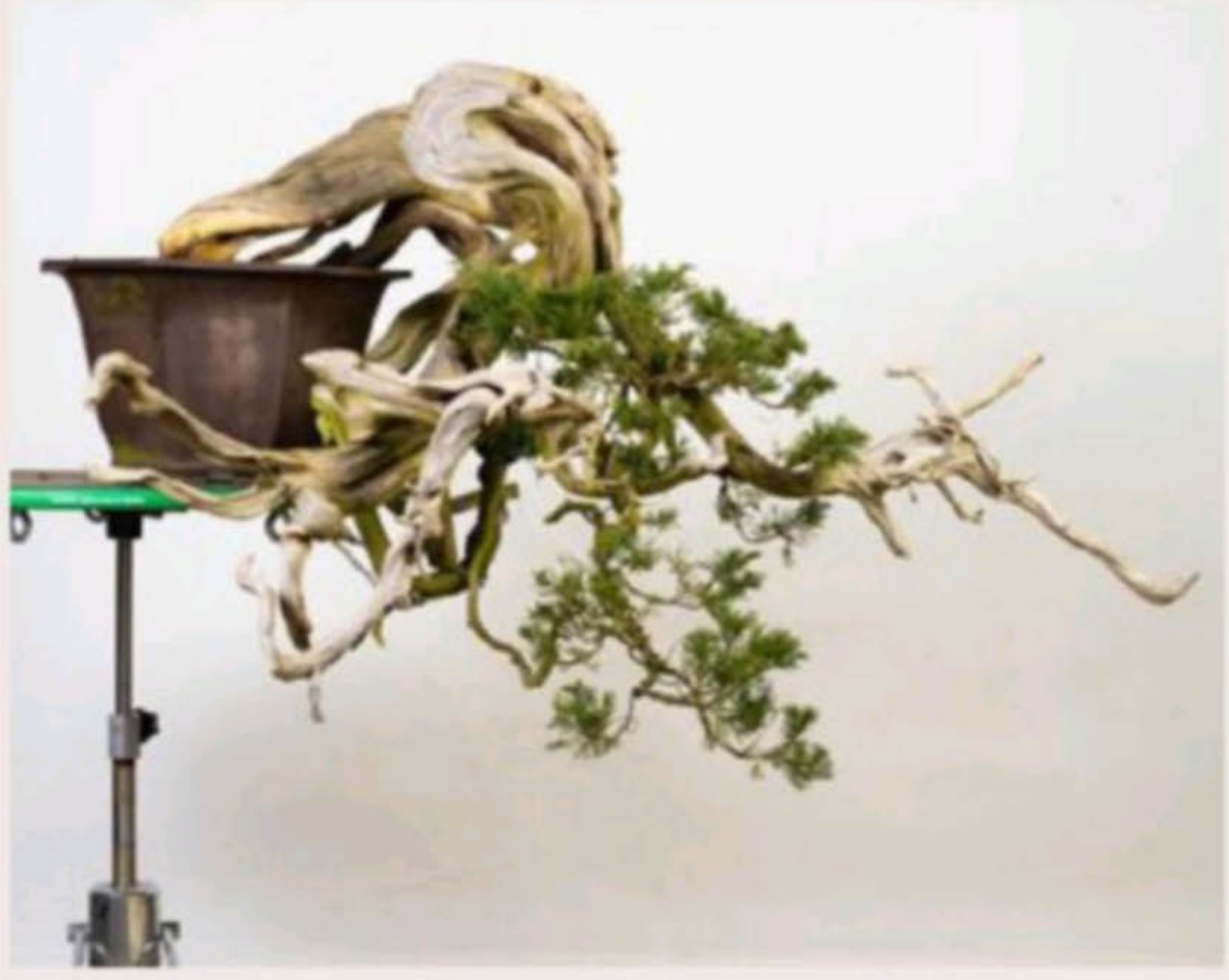
Manuel Germade shows how to graft new foliage

Text and photography: Bonsai Focus Studio

Grafting new foliage to a tree is a common technique used in Japan. It is applied when the natural foliage type of a tree is too leggy, coarse or even weak, and therefore not so suitable for bonsai. Even fashion plays a role in deciding to use graft technique to replace the entire foliage type

The sabina juniper of Dominique Bosch has got a basic design already, it will now be made into a semi cascade. As you can see, there is no good balance between the massive deadwood and the foliage, but with a sabina variety you cannot achieve very dense foliage pads to bring it into balance with the strong deadwood, so grafting a stronger juniper variety on to it will solve the problem. The sabina shown here also has the male foliage which tends to be quite weak.

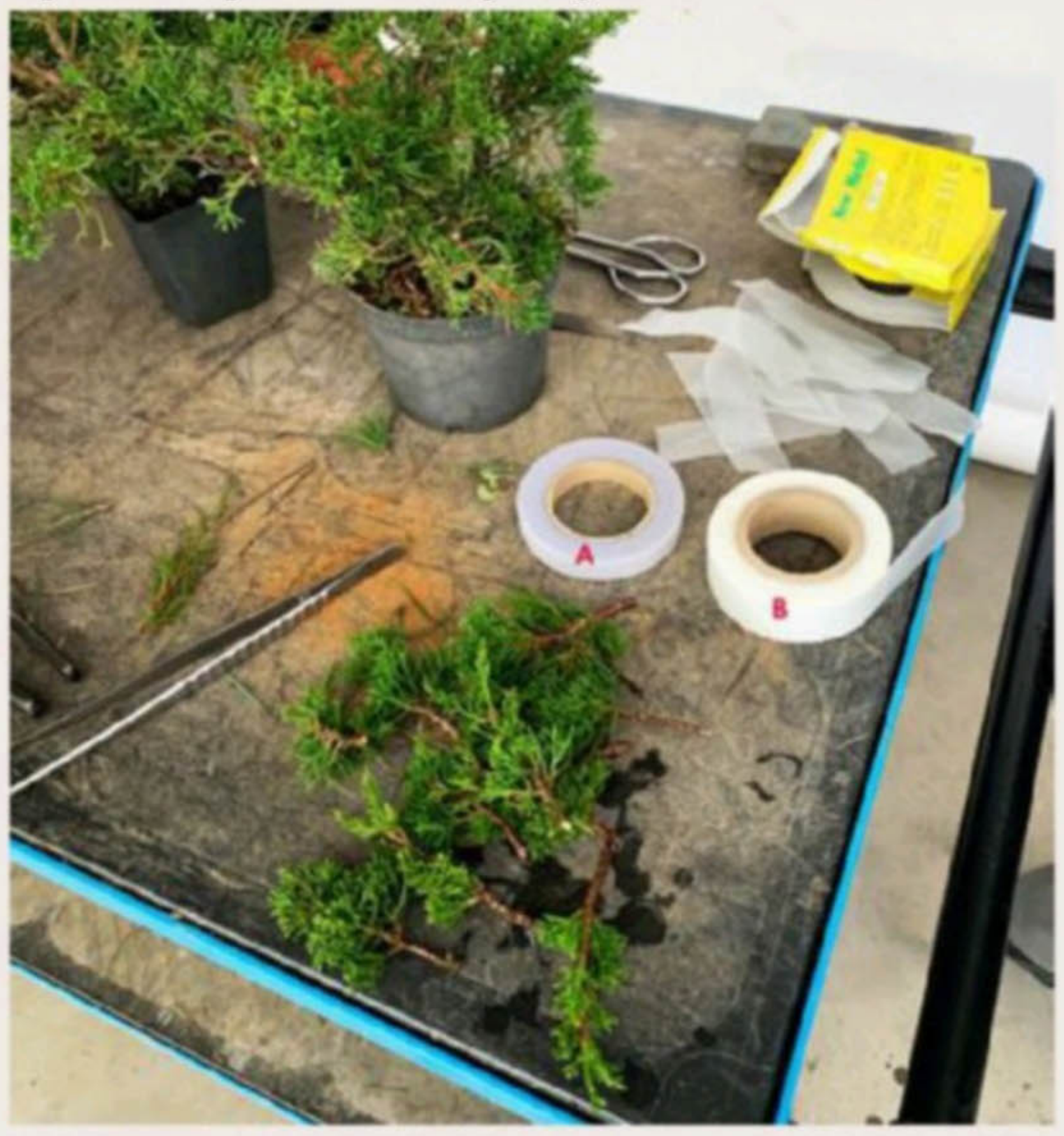
In most cases when grafting new foliage to the tree the *Itoigawa* variety is chosen since it grows very strong and dense. A sabina juniper can even become stronger with the new grafts and, of course, it will look much better, too. I will show you here step by step how it is generally done. The best time to start grafting is early spring.



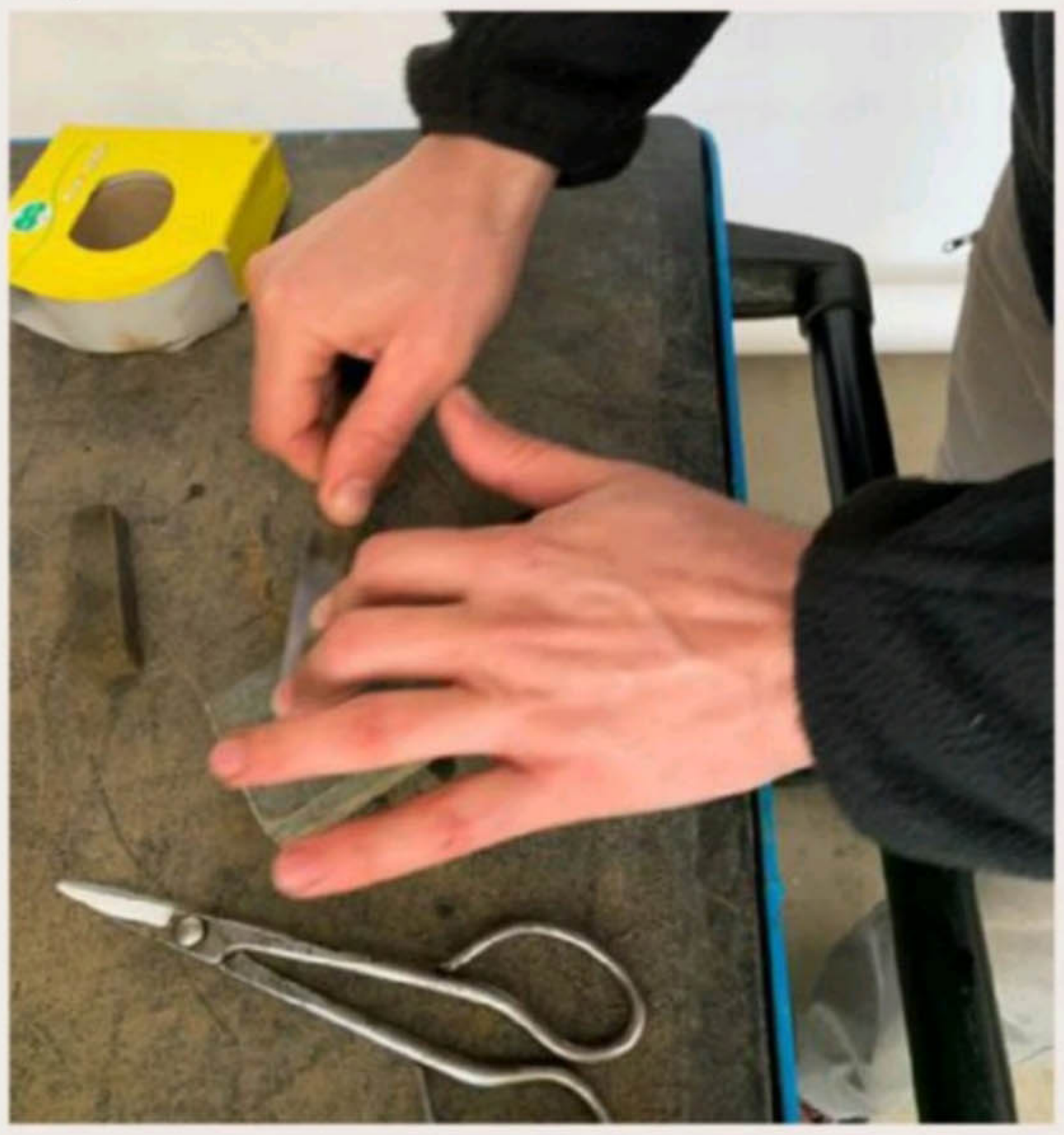
Top: The Itoigawa *stock from which I will take the scions. Above: The example juniper on which I will graft new foliage of* Itoigawa

Preparing the material

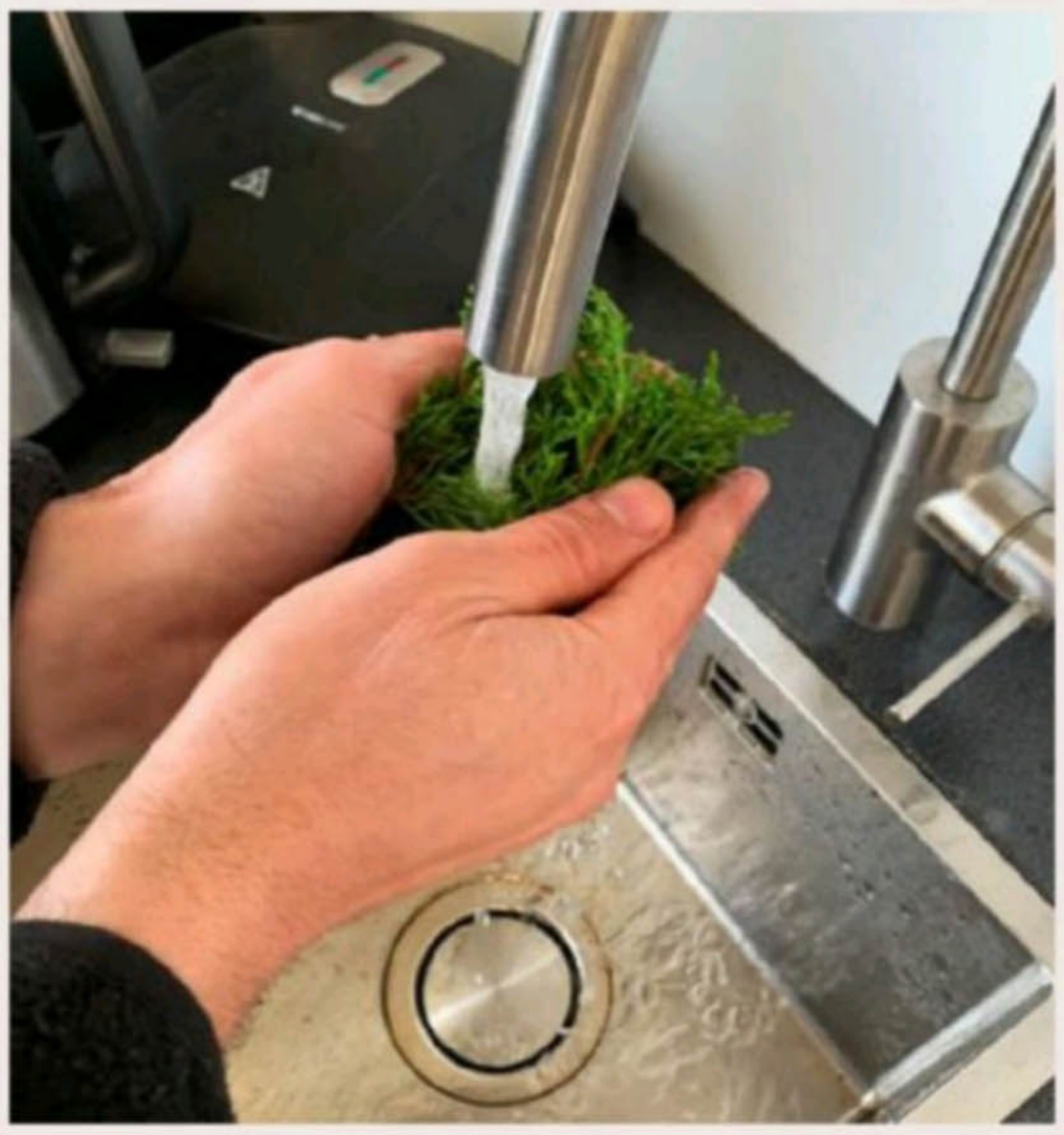
Have everything ready, the scions and pieces of grafting tape. There are two types of tape: A: Tape to anchor the scion to the branch. B: Very stretchable tape to wrap around the foliage



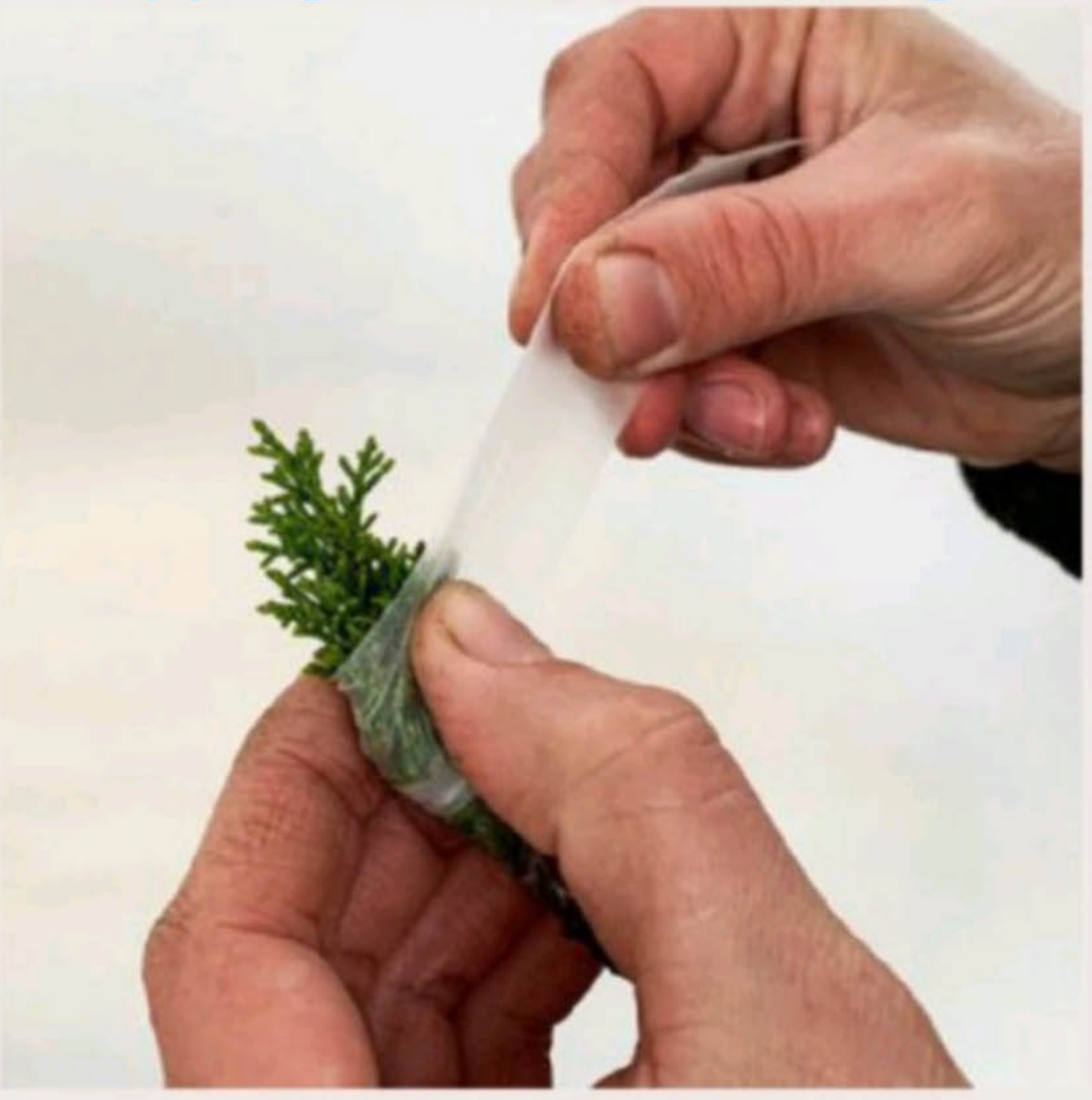
Use clean, very sharp tools, and sharpen the grafting knife in advance



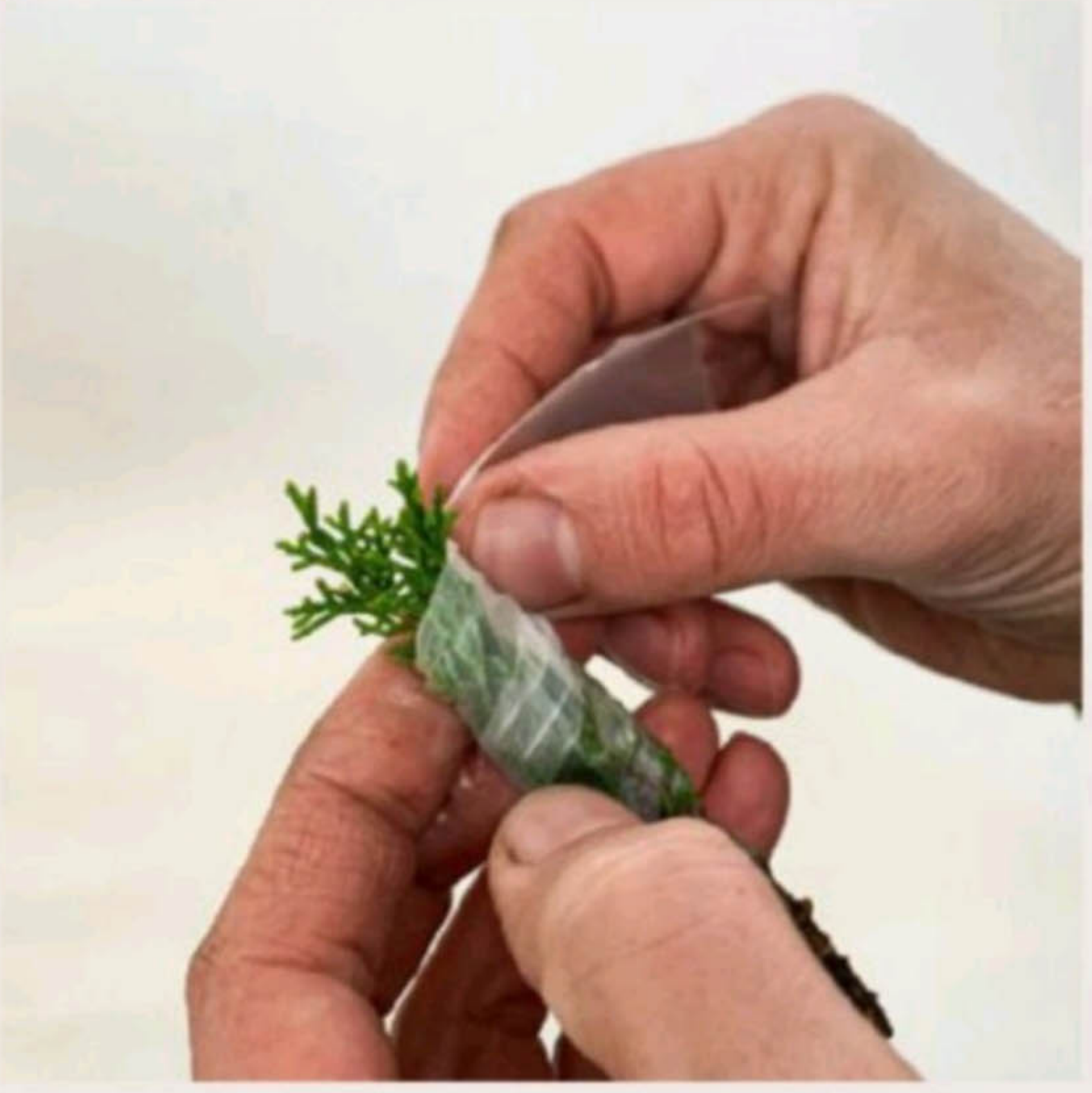
The whips should be moistened first



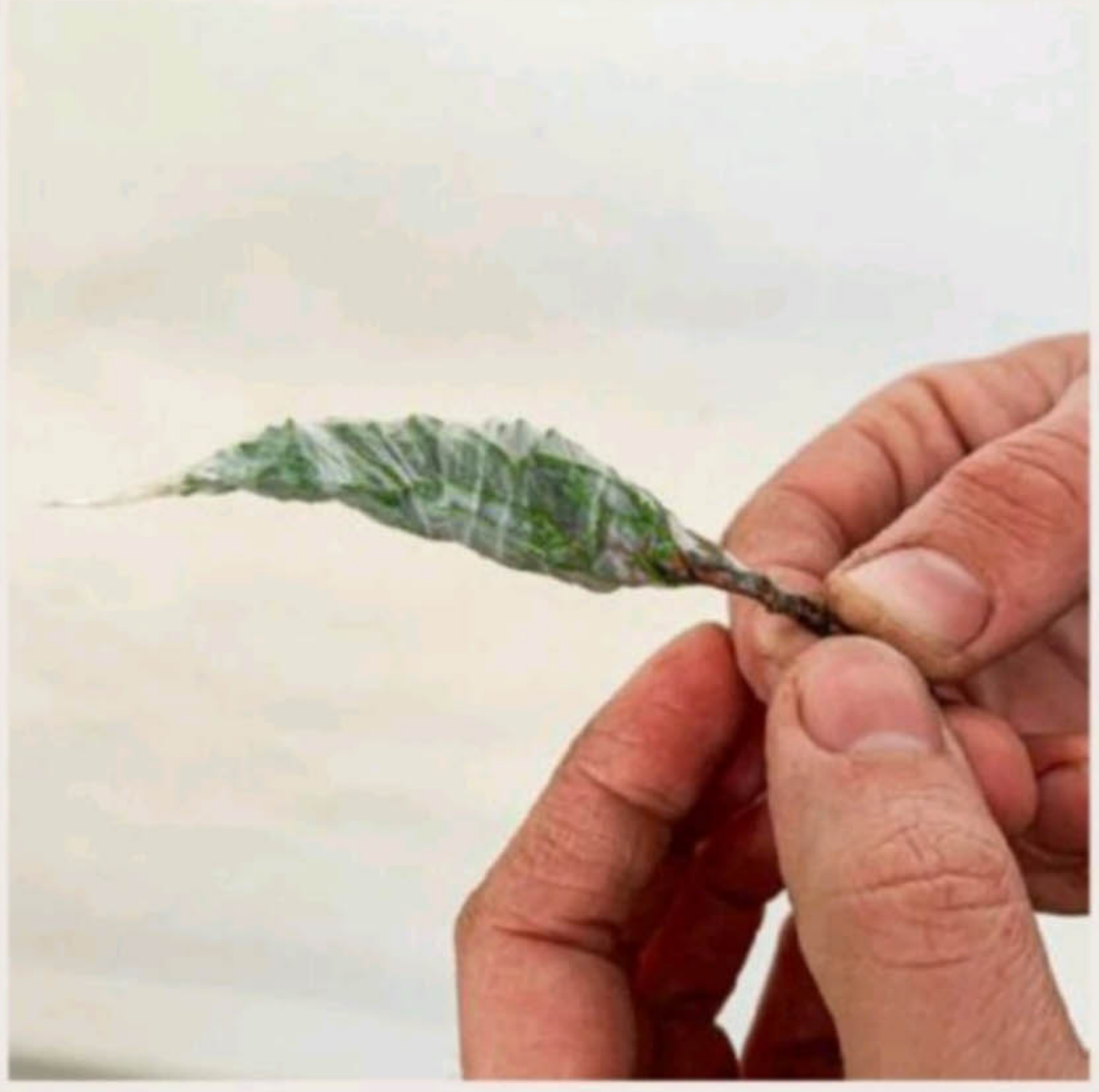
Wrapping the scions in the grafting tape



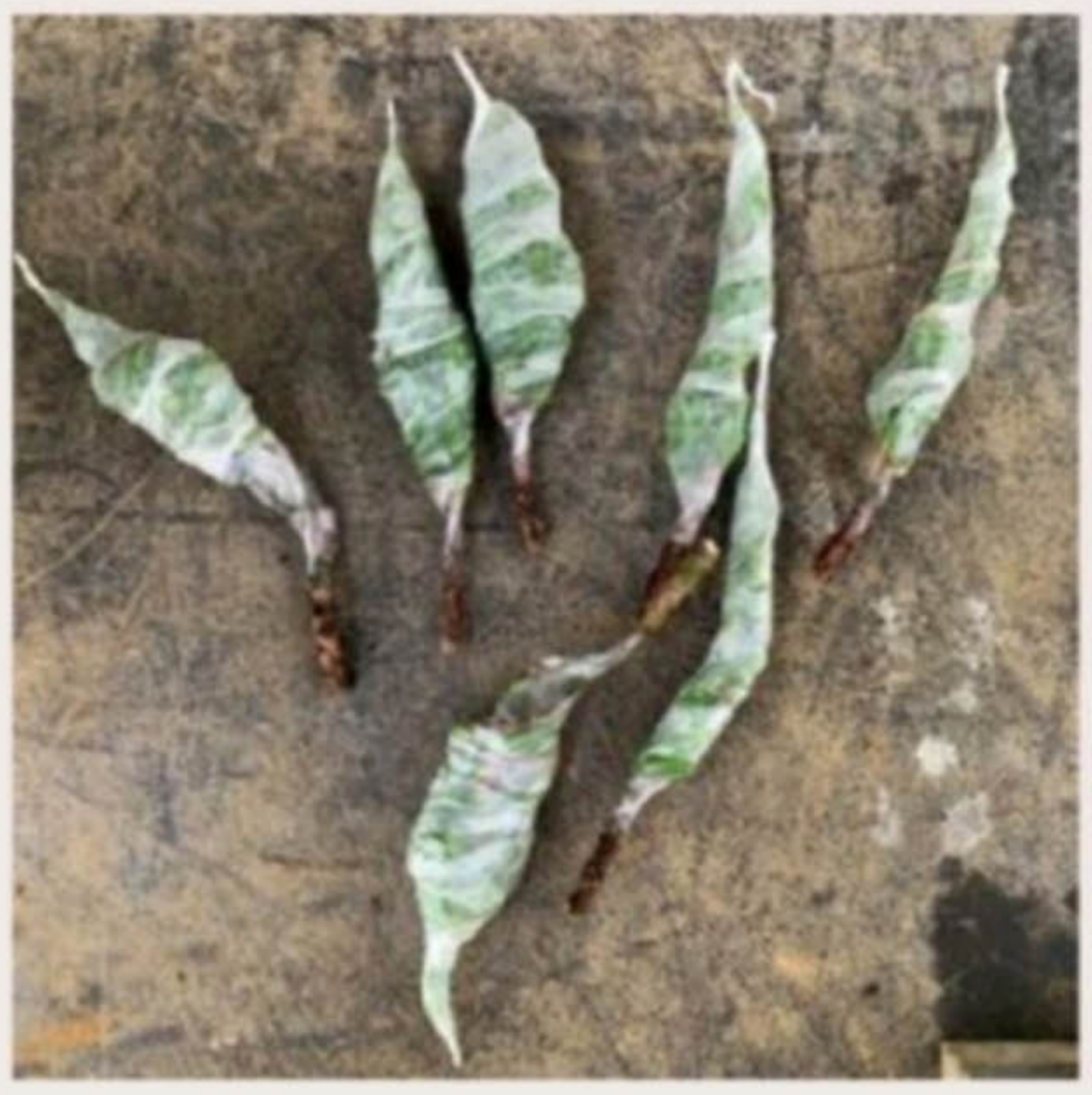
The scion is wrapped in the stretchable grafting tape. Similar to a cocoon, it should have no gaps because moisture should be locked in to keep the scion alive



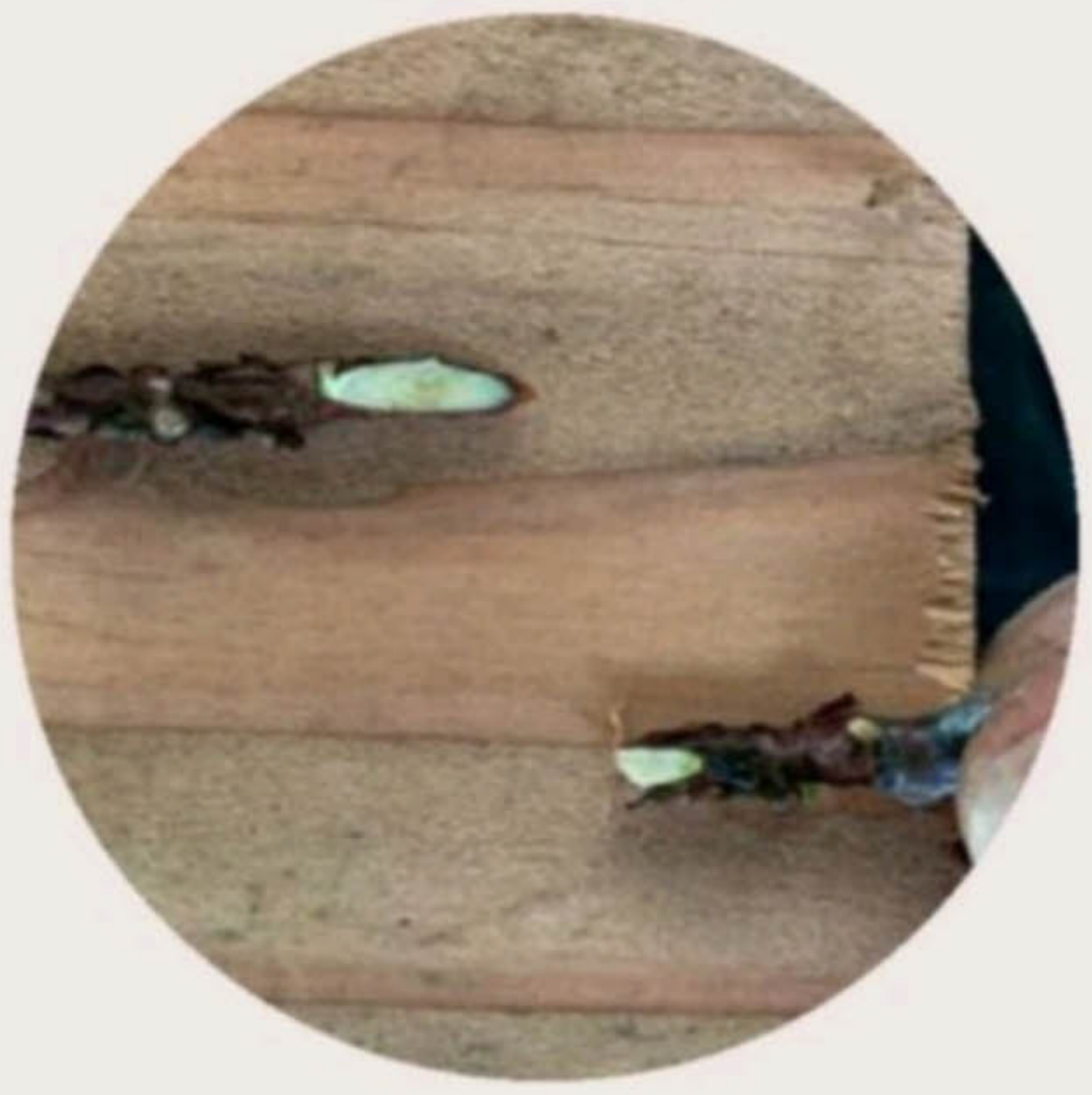
Wrap it very tightly, overlapping the first layer



Like a cocoon, it is now ready to be grafted

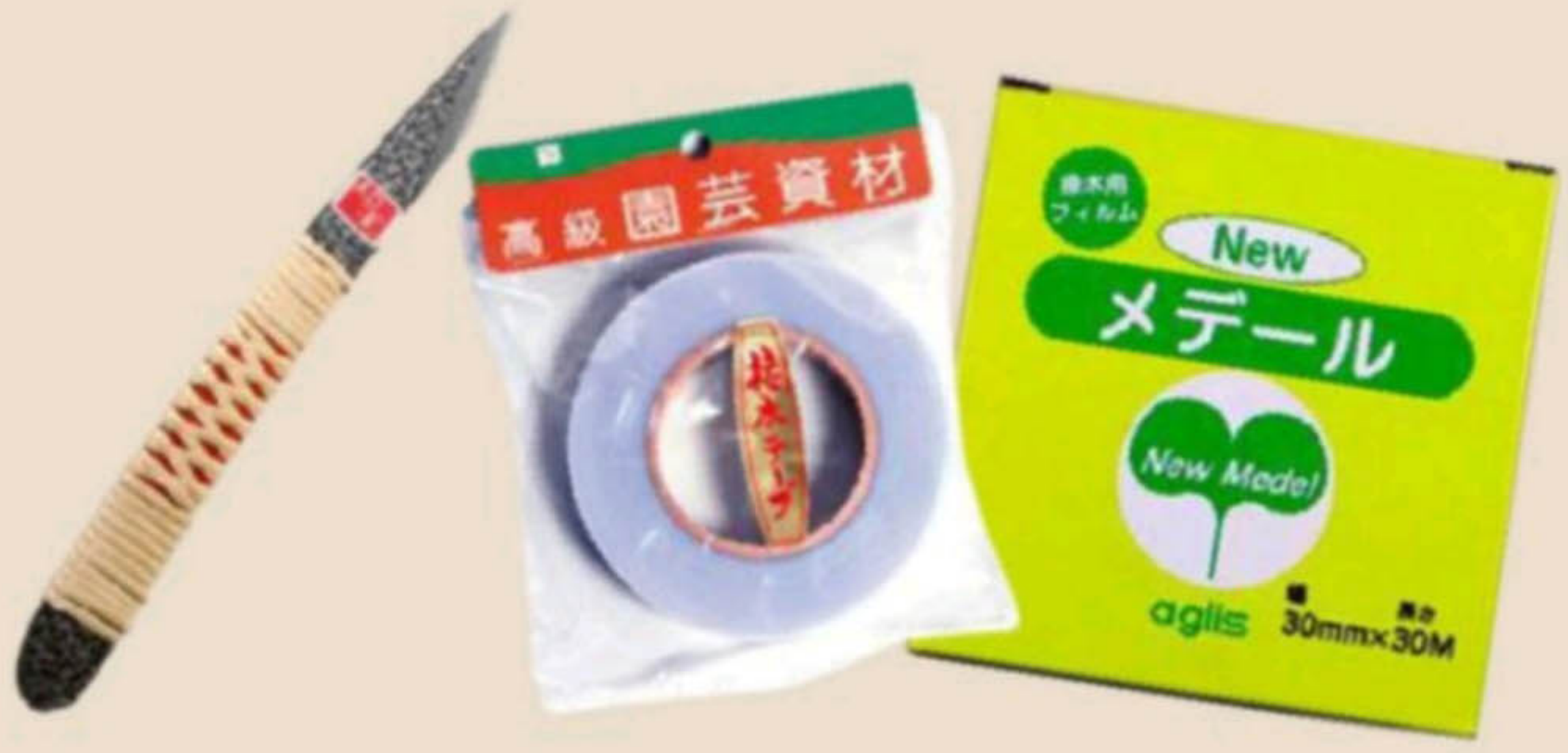


All scions are ready to be cut before inserting in the branch



Make a long sloping cut, then flip over to the opposite side and make a short cut

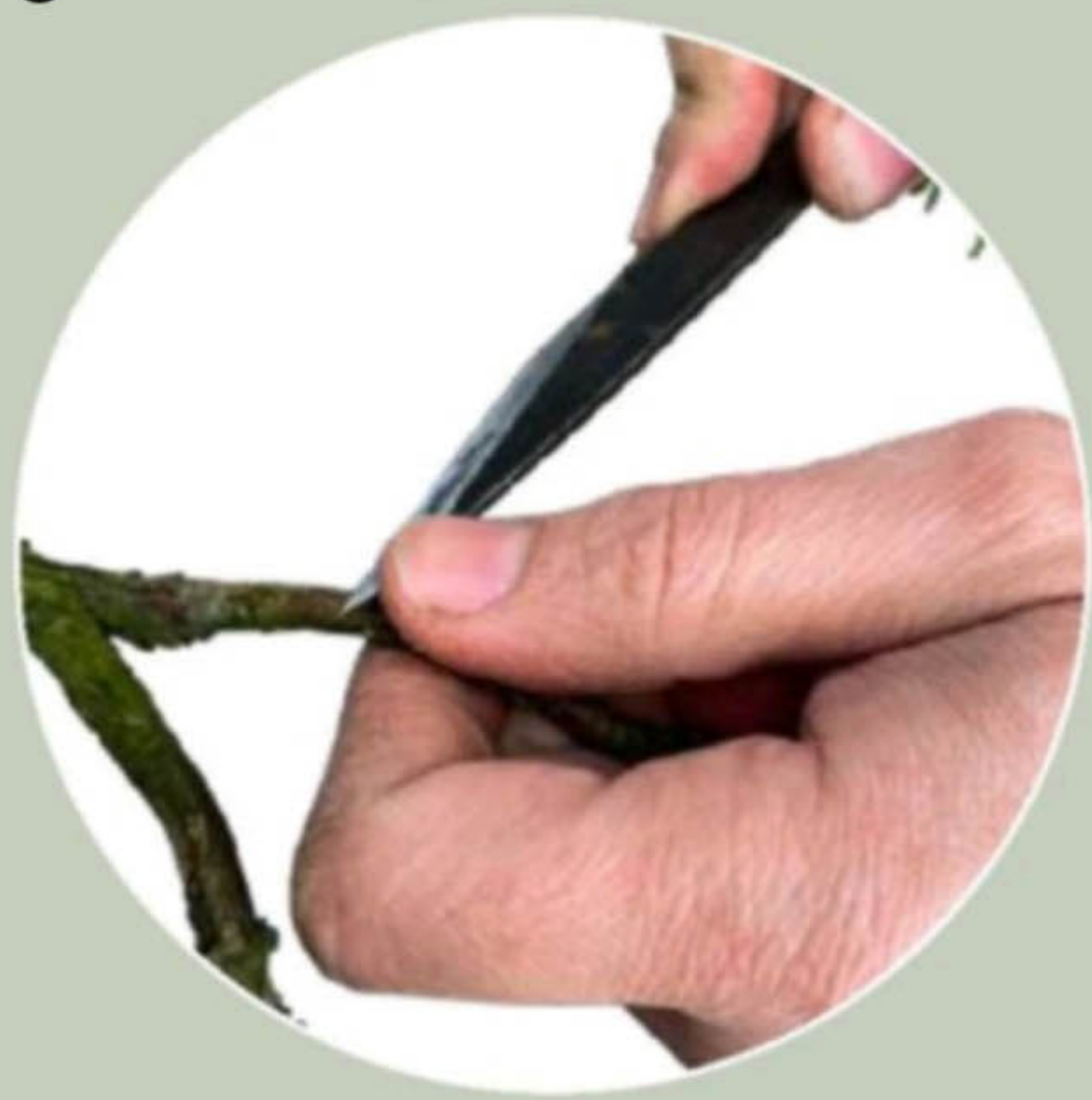
Essential items



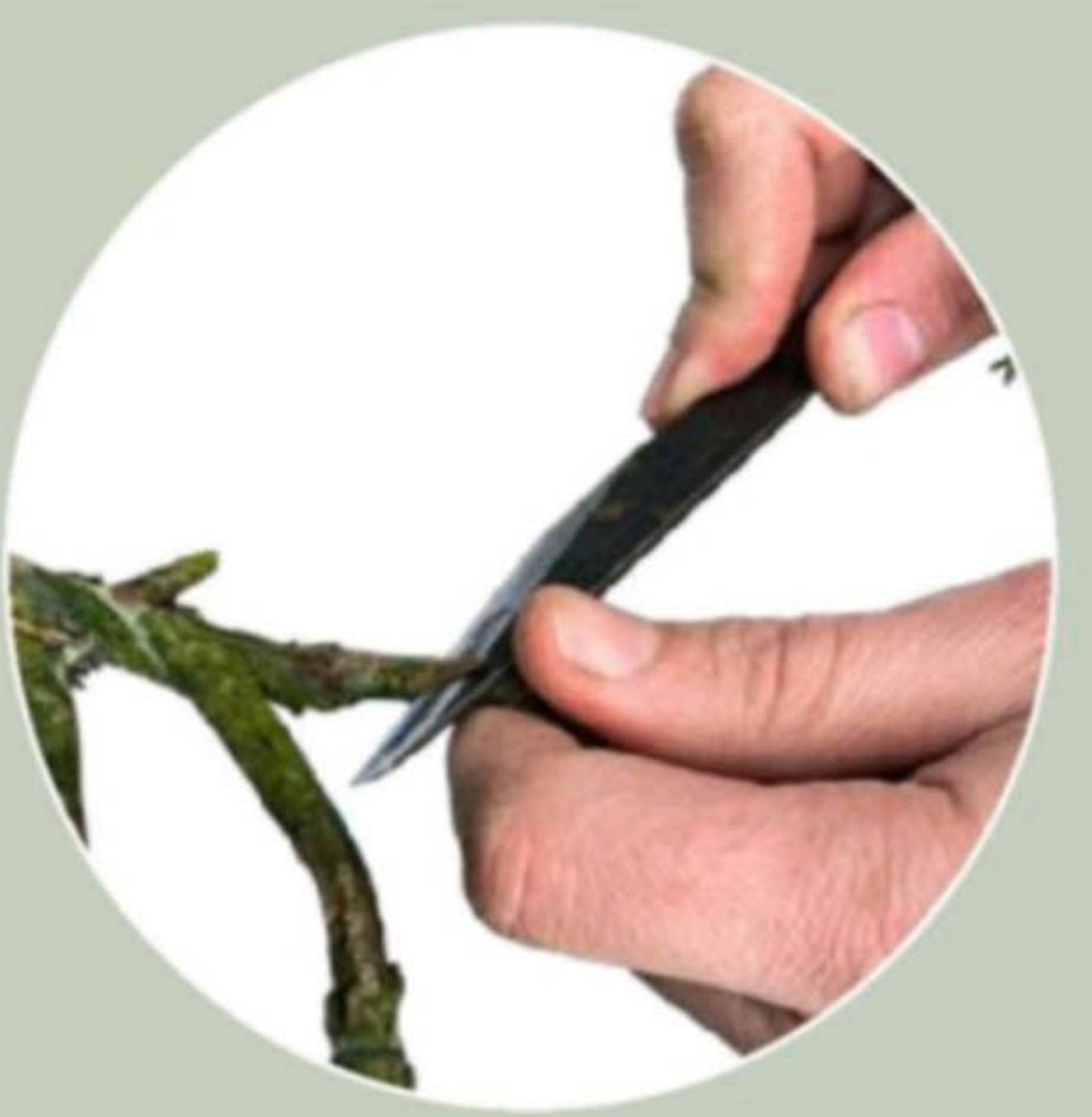
You need to have a very sharp grafting knife (left) and the special grafting tapes for anchoring (centre), plus the stretchable tape (right) for wrapping the scion

Making the cut

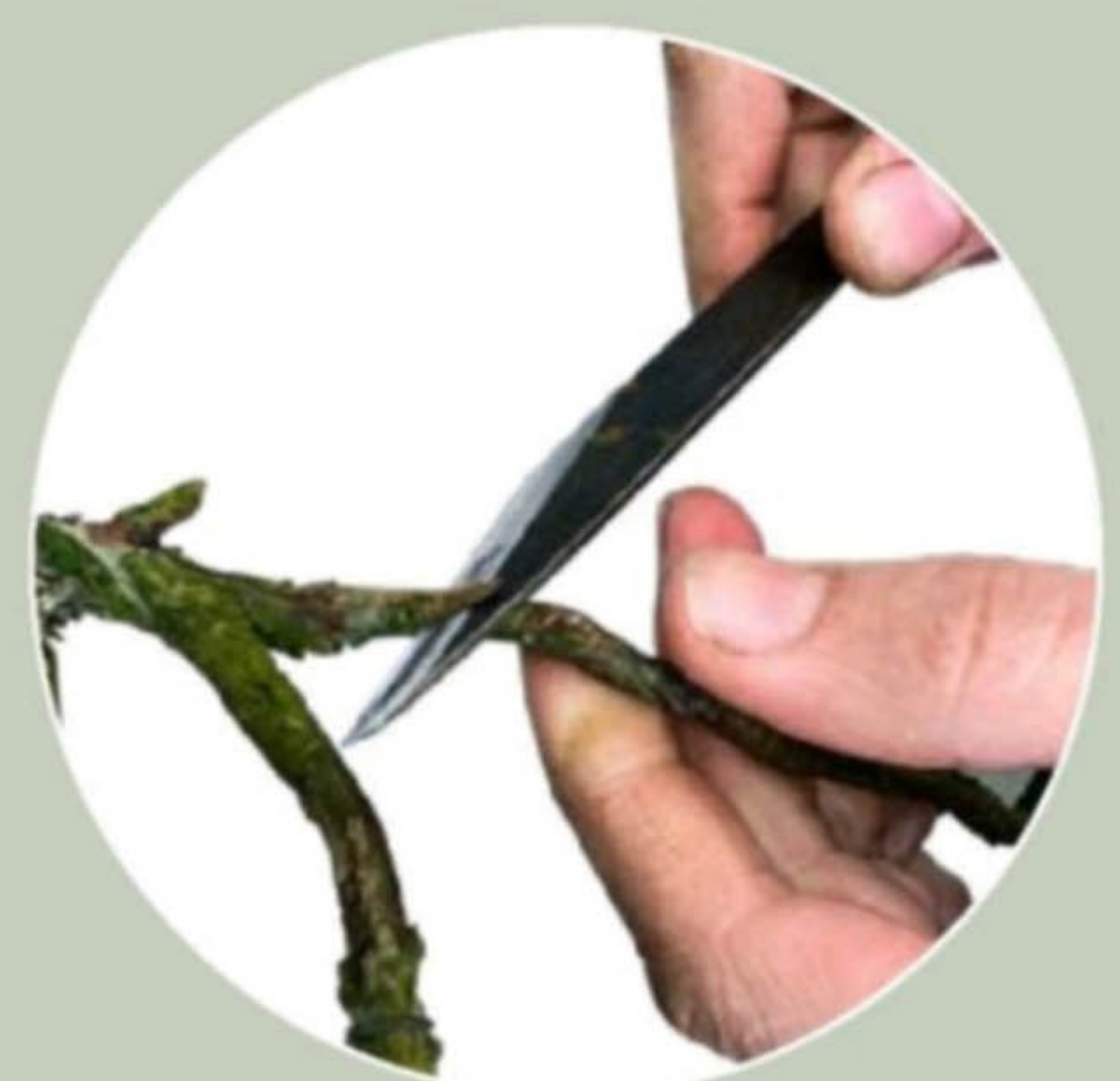
The correct way of making the cut in the live vein is essential to allow the scion take. The scion and branch on which it will be grafted need to have a similar thickness.



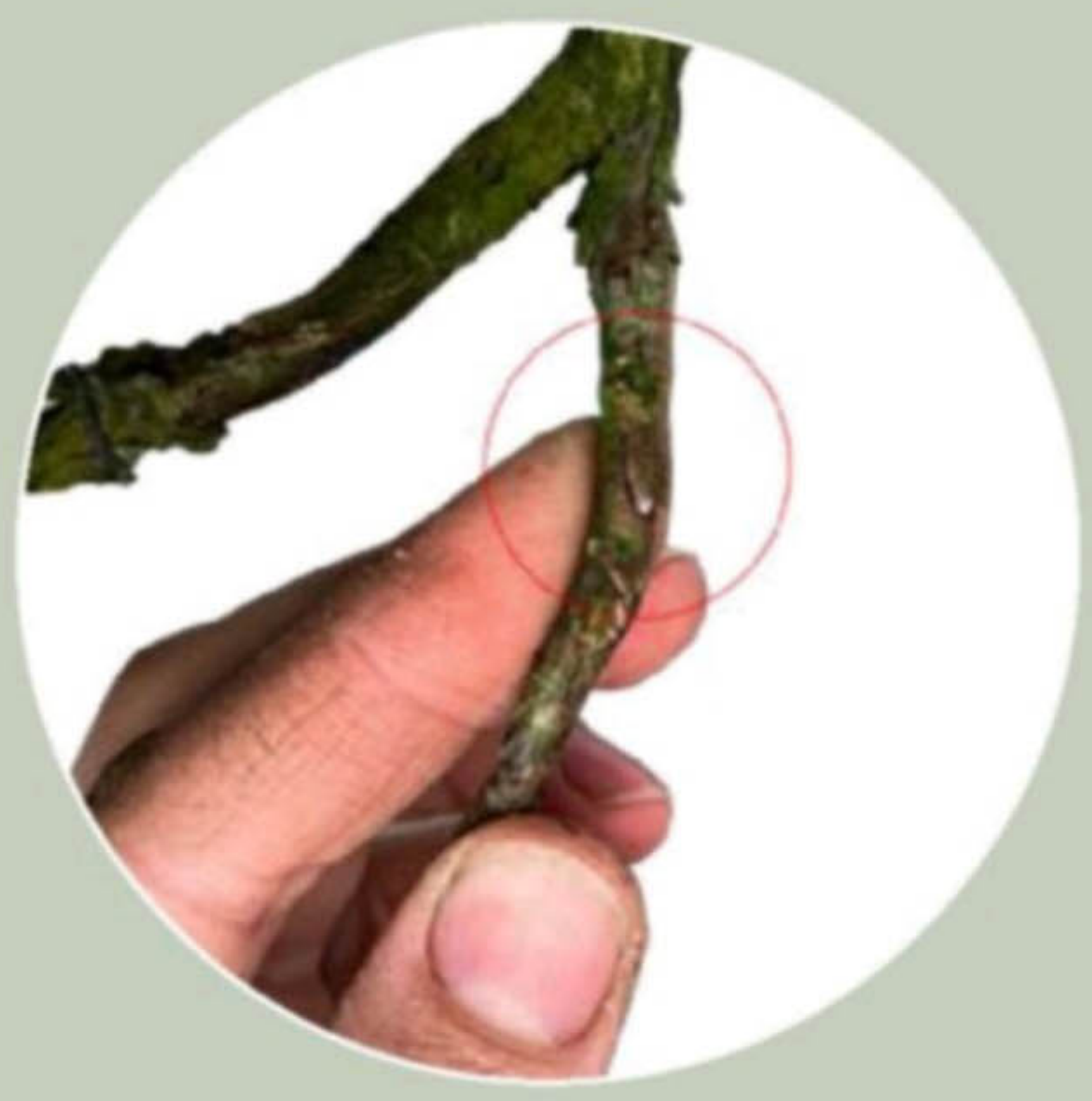
I use a sharp grafting knife to make a cut that is large enough into which the complete scion will fit



Carefully and gently, start the cut



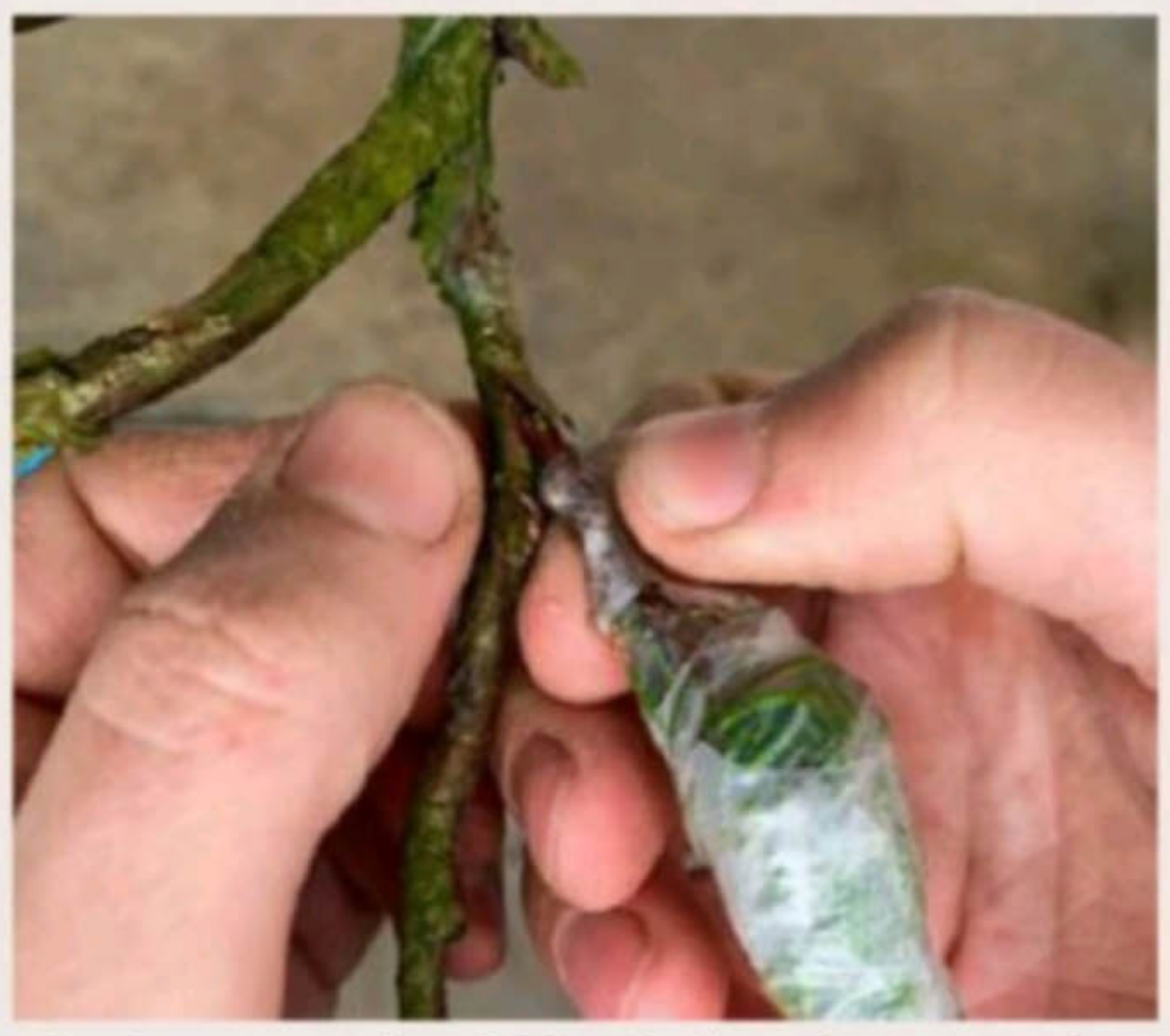
Then slowly press the knife further keeping the same inclination

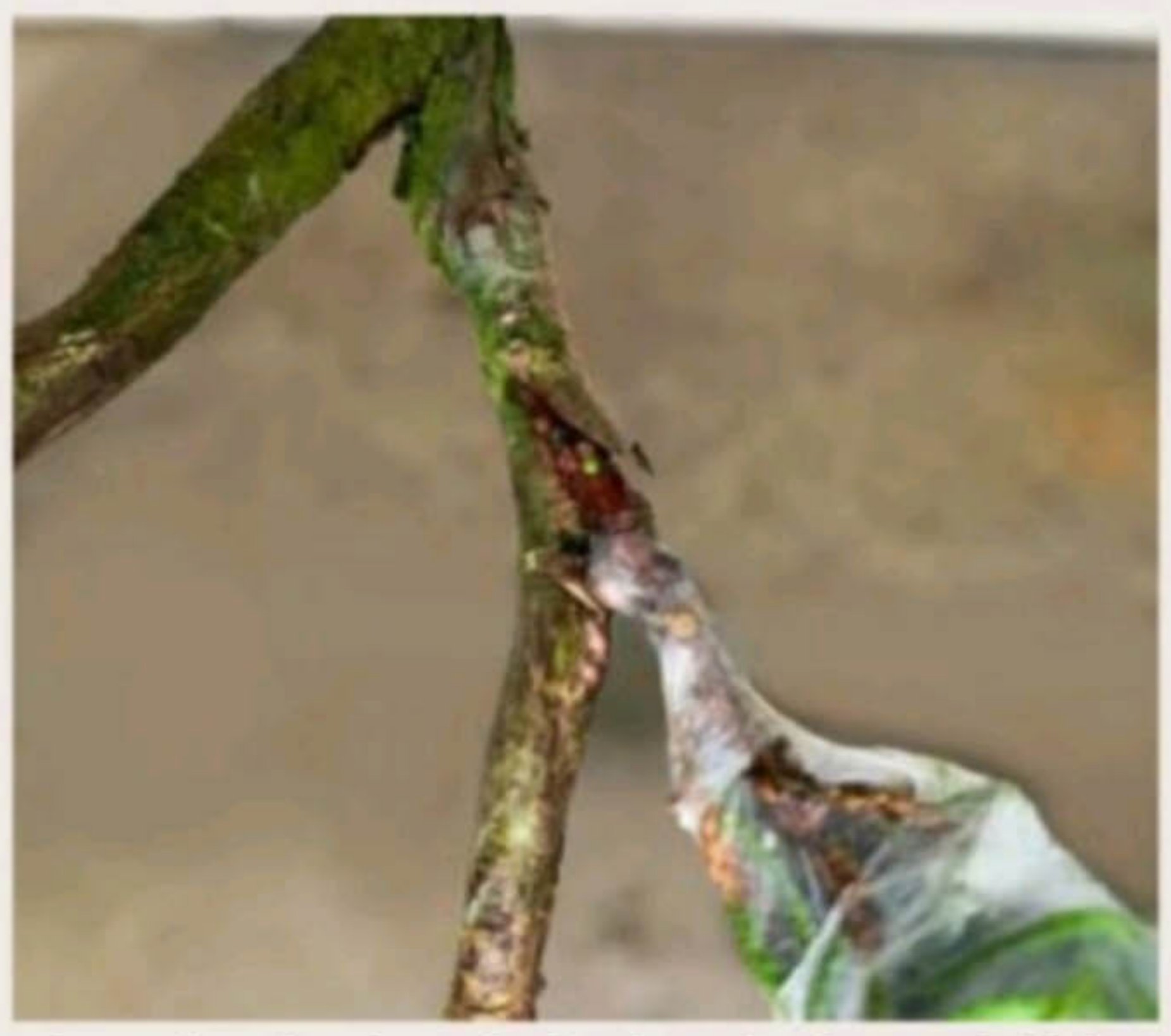


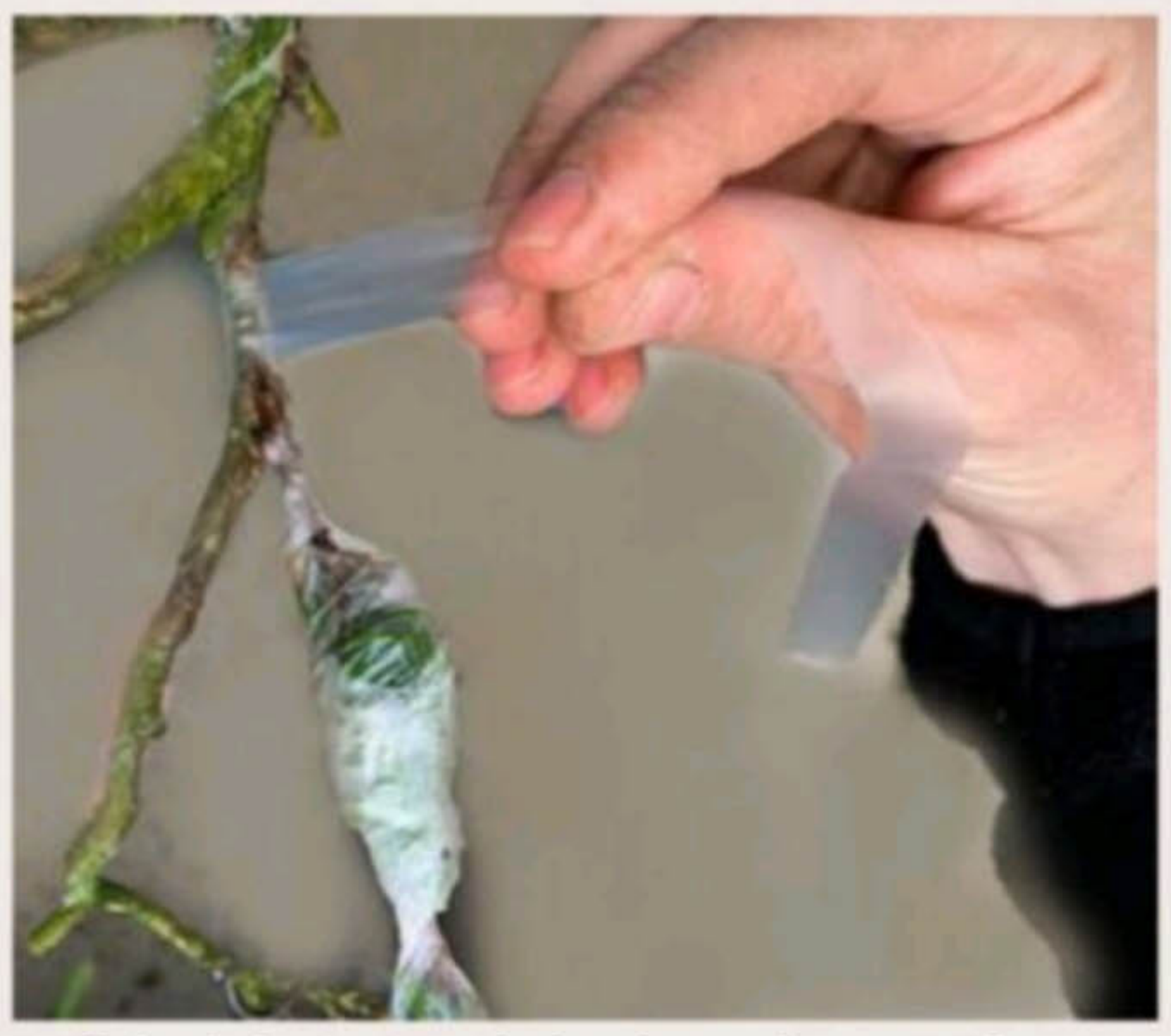
This is how a proper cut will need to look

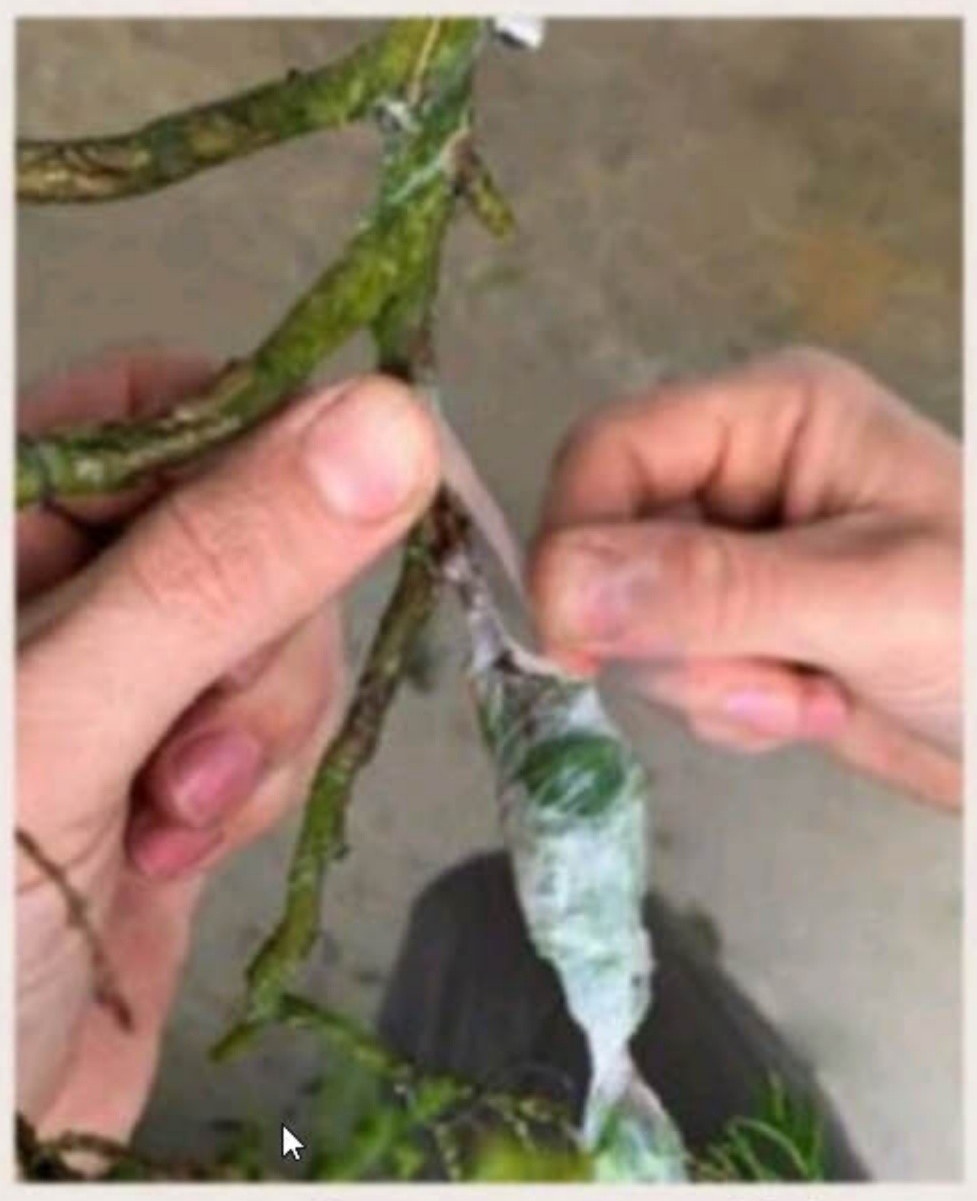
Inserting the scion

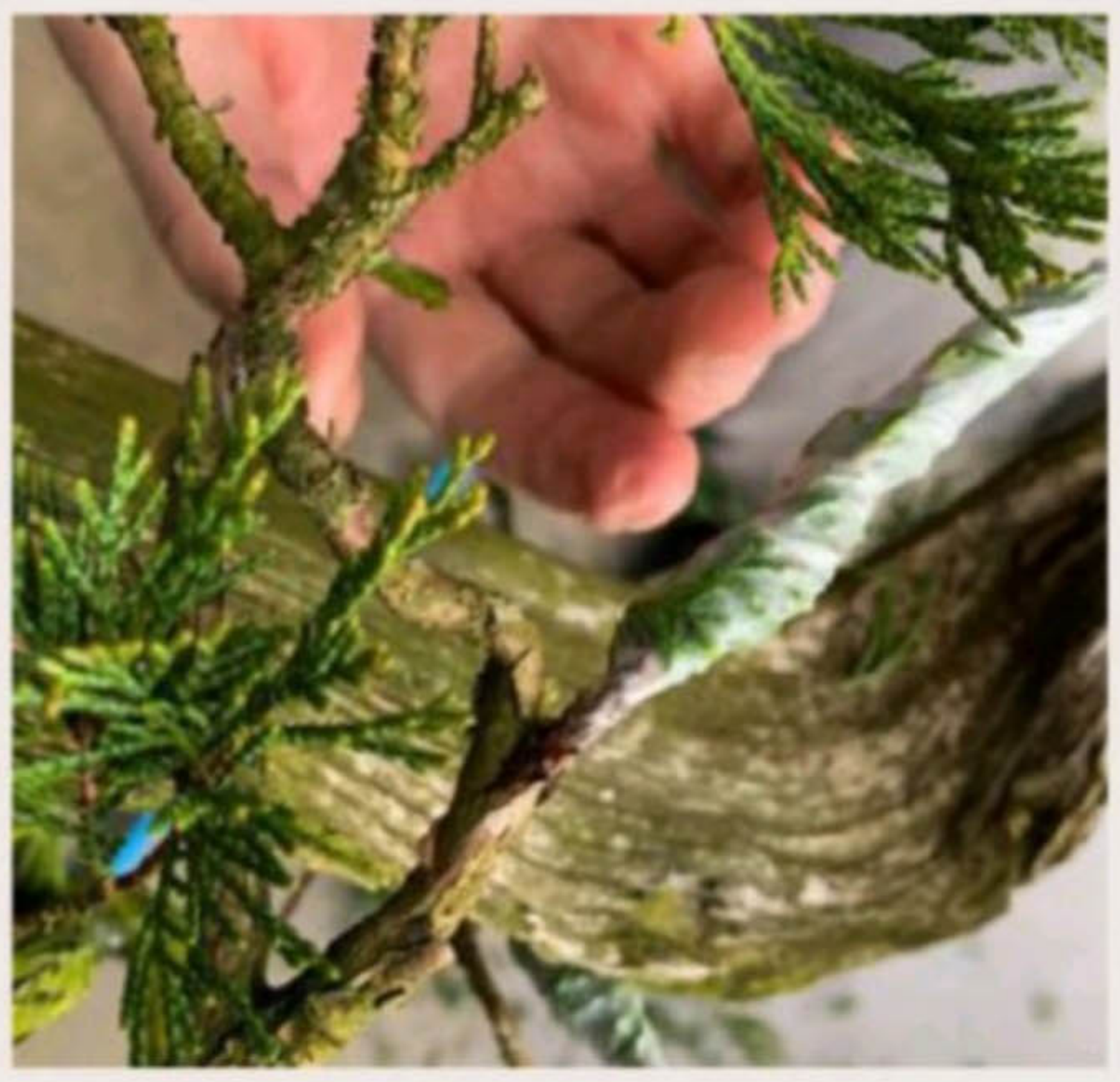
Insert the scion with long cut downwards and the short facing upwards into the cut. Support the scion with your hands to not damage the cut. The cambium layer of the scion and that of the donor should align. Use grafting tape to wrap around the branch tightly. Use cut paste to close the cut flap and add some cut paste in the branch pit to close it as well. The next day you must see condensation as proof that there is a good connection between the two. It also means that the scion receives moisture from the tree. If so, you can remove the very weak foliage of the sabina. Always check that there is not a leak in one of the cocoons.

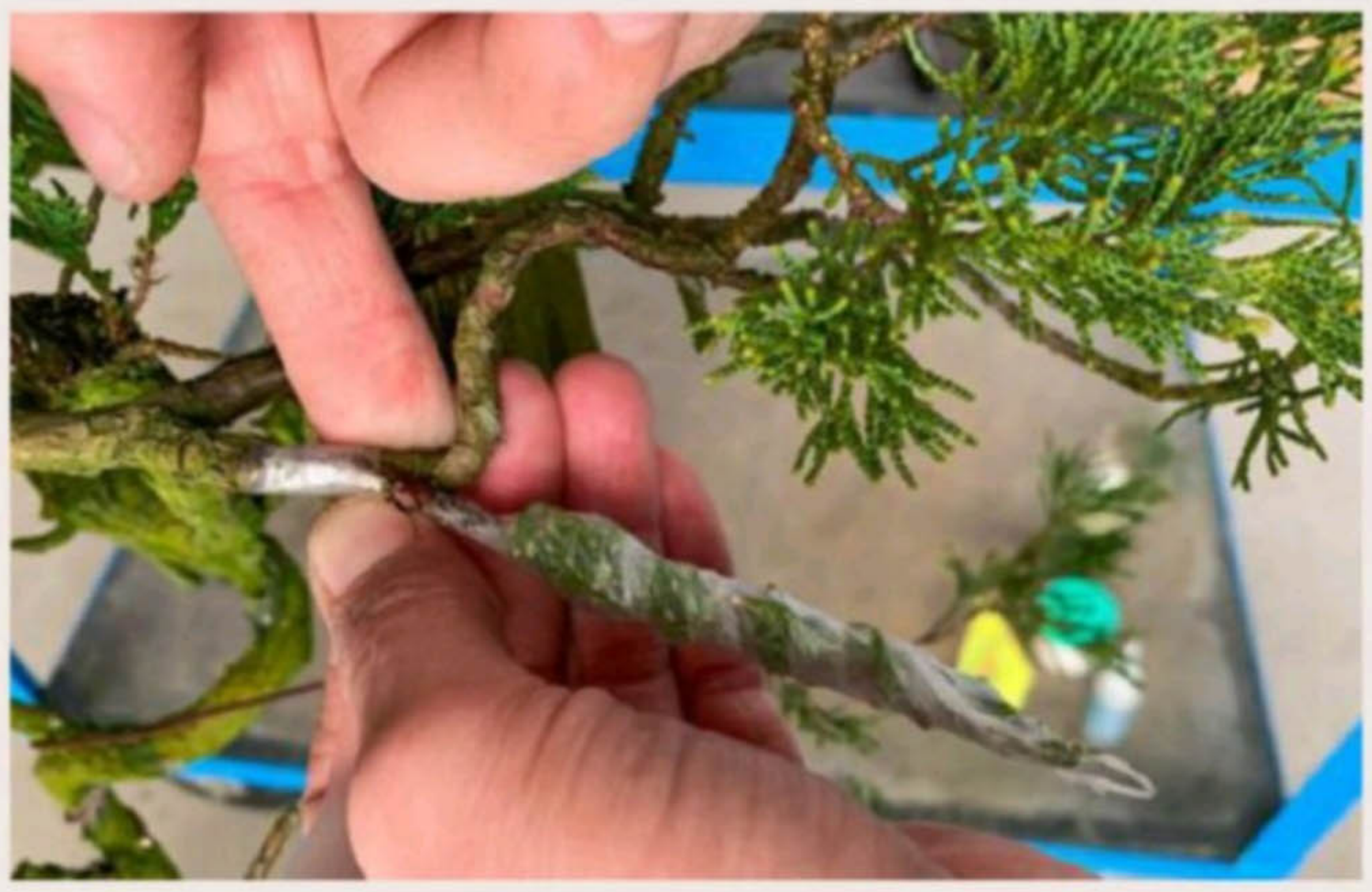

The long cut should be facing downwards

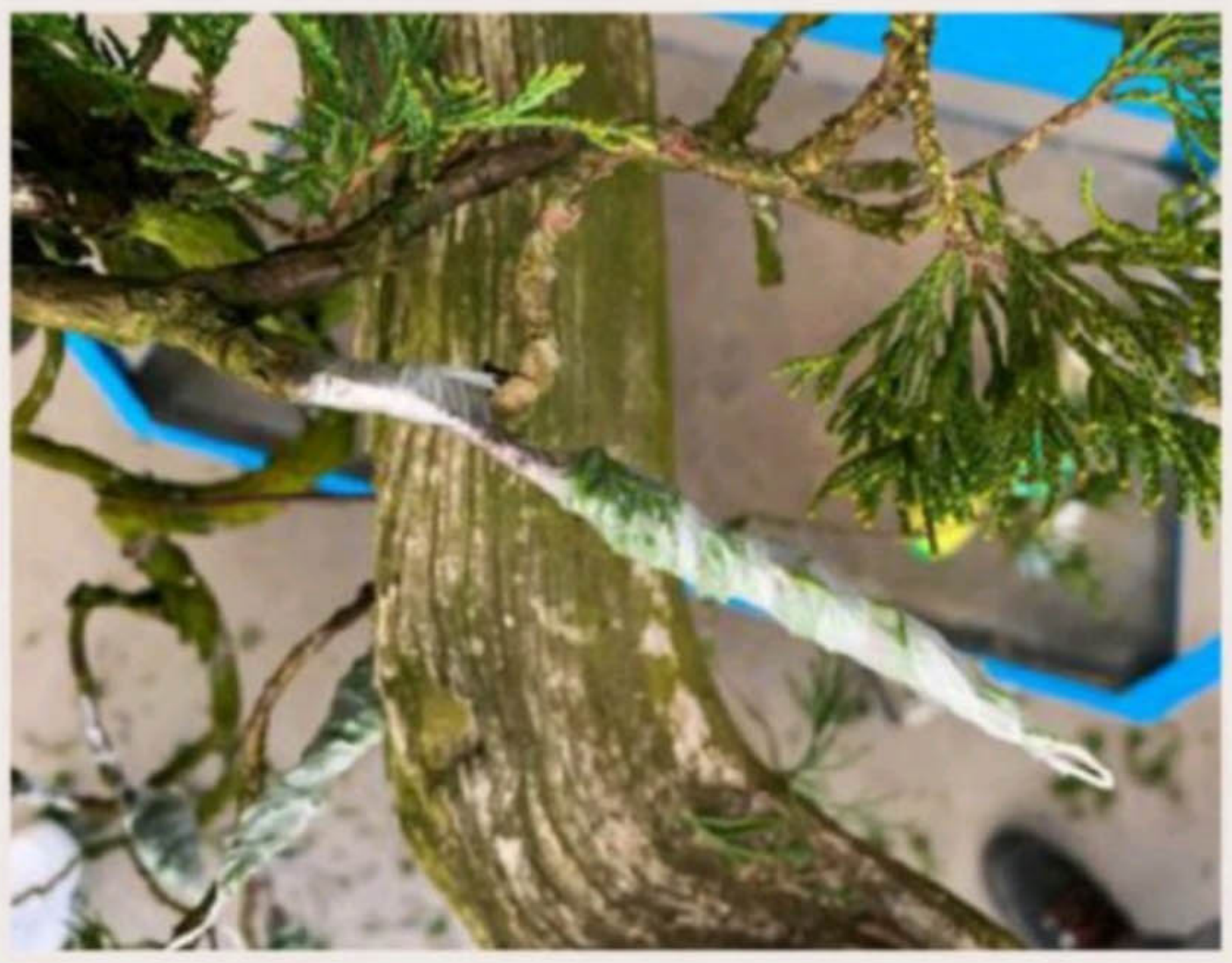

The scion is placed, don't wiggle or shift it too much to avoid damaging the cut flap.


Pull it tight around the branch to anchor the graft


Use your fingers to avoid it slipping loose


The scion is positioned on the branch


Use cut paste to close the branch pit


Another example of a scion on the same tree

Aftercare

The whole process was started early in spring. So, in the following summer the graft will start to grow, which is a sign that they are taking. The new growth will start to push at the end of the so-called cocoon. You can then carefully open the tip of the cocoon and eventually open the wrapping to free the foliage part if you see it is thriving well. However, leave the anchoring wrapping in place till the spring of the following year, when the foliage starts to grow. If all scions thrive well, you can remove some of the original foliage of the sabina juniper. A year later you can remove even more of the original foliage. Eventually all of the sabina will be replaced by the *Itoigawa* foliage.

Time waits patiently

Kunio Kobayashi takes his time working on a black pine

Text and photography: Kinbon, Japan

Kunio Kobayashi entered the world of bonsai via satsuki bonsai. After mastering it, he came to realise its expressive limitations and was simultaneously drawn to shohaku bonsai. The reason being that both the trunk and the large branches could be bent. Here you can fully witness a realm beyond those limits through Mr Kobayashi's relentless pursuit of the ideal — 'bringing out the best qualities' — and his refined techniques of transformation

The Master is known for flashy performances, and he is always emphasizing to his apprentices the importance of not rushing.

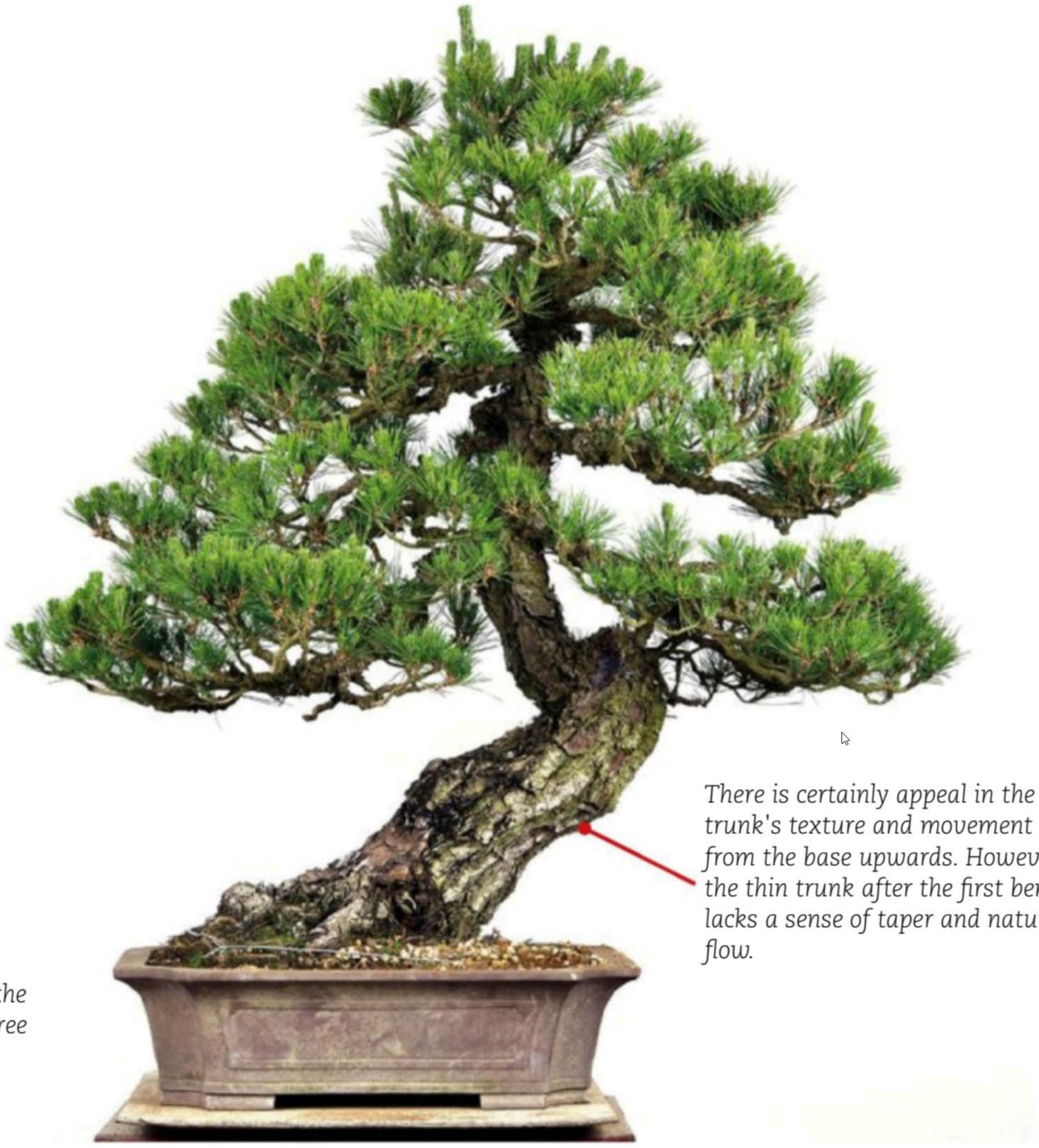
'Make time your ally,' he says, trying to instil in them the importance of always being kind to the tree. 'In photos of my transformation work, I'm often shown holding a chainsaw, but this is by no means for show. Please make sure to make that clear,' he says. During the demonstrations and similar events, time is limited, and the work must be completed within that short window. In that sense, the chainsaw is an essential tool for saving time. Speaking about time, the whole project was done within the following time shifts: 28th May 2022, 24th September 2022, 25th April 2024, 20th June 2024 and 28th September 2024. Time waited patiently.

May 28, 2022

Considering the current front

The front view, as seen by the previous owner. The aged bark and powerful lower trunk movement are certainly noteworthy features, characteristic of an old black pine. Mr Kobayashi was dissatisfied with the poor taper, though, and movement of the trunk starting from the first bend. 'This shape, where a thin trunk suddenly rises up from a curved base — is just not acceptable.'

Mr Kobayashi appears to have addressed this flaw by reconsidering the front of the tree. Rather than being stuck with the current front, he seeks a better design. That, he says, is really the true appeal of transformation.



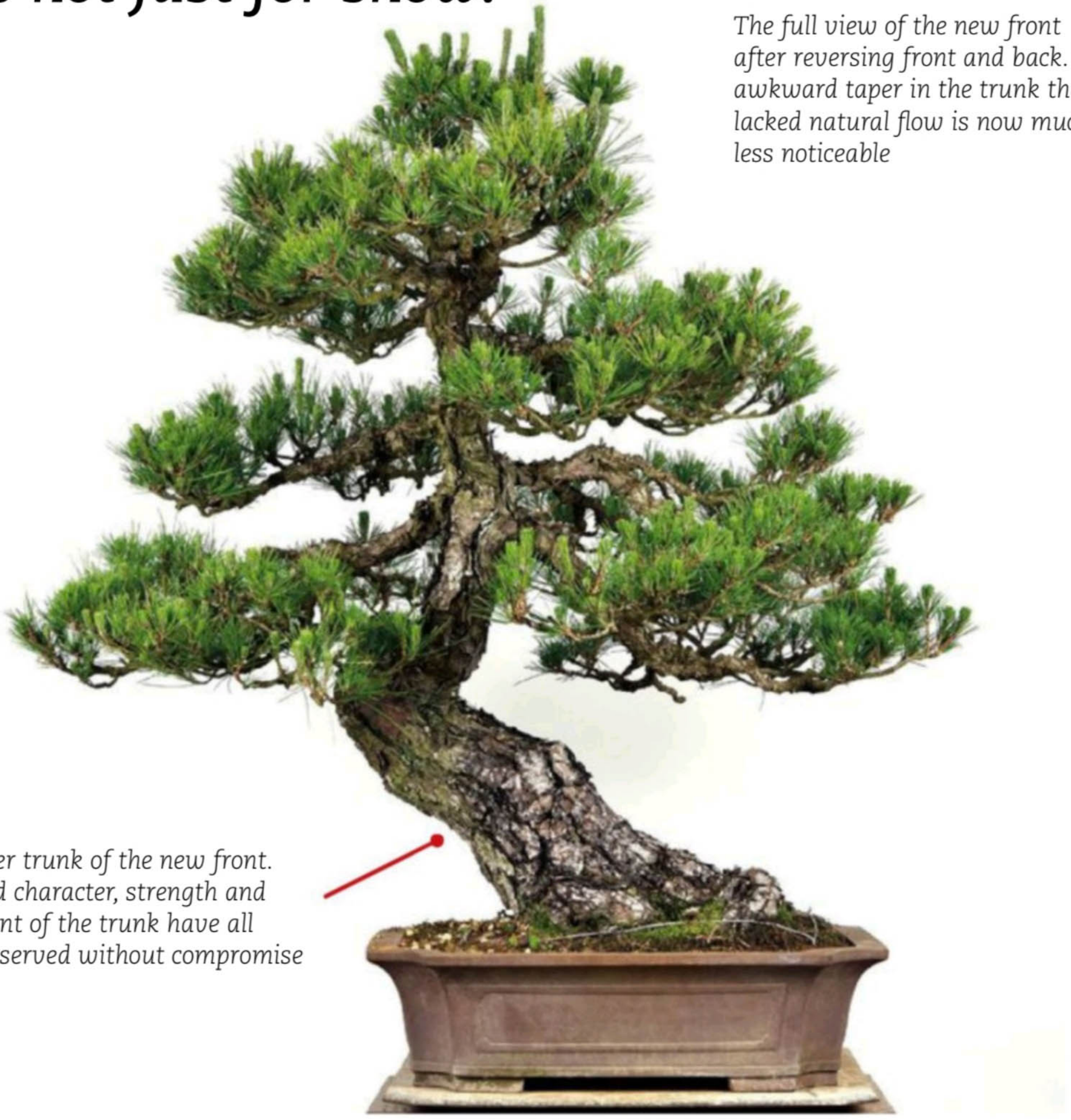
There is certainly appeal in the trunk's texture and movement from the base upwards. However, the thin trunk after the first bend lacks a sense of taper and natural flow.

Current front view. The thinness of the upper trunk is certainly a concern. Tree height: 125 cm. Width: 107 cm. Pot: Japanese rectangular

> *Using a chainsaw is not just for show!*

The idea of flipping the front and back

Although Mr Kobayashi developed from satsuki bonsai to bonsai in general, the idea of reversing the front and back is something that he had already explored extensively during his satsuki days. With satsuki, the trunk often can't be bent, and if the root spread is strong, there's a limit to how much the planting angle can be changed. Additionally, the typically weak apex of satsuki makes it difficult to rebuild the main structure. With conifers, especially black pine, it is a different story. Its flexibility allows for bending the trunk and even radically changing the trunk line, both of them valid options in a transformation. A monotonous trunk can be concealed by rotating one of the front branches into place. Naturally, changing the trunk line is also one of the viable strategies.

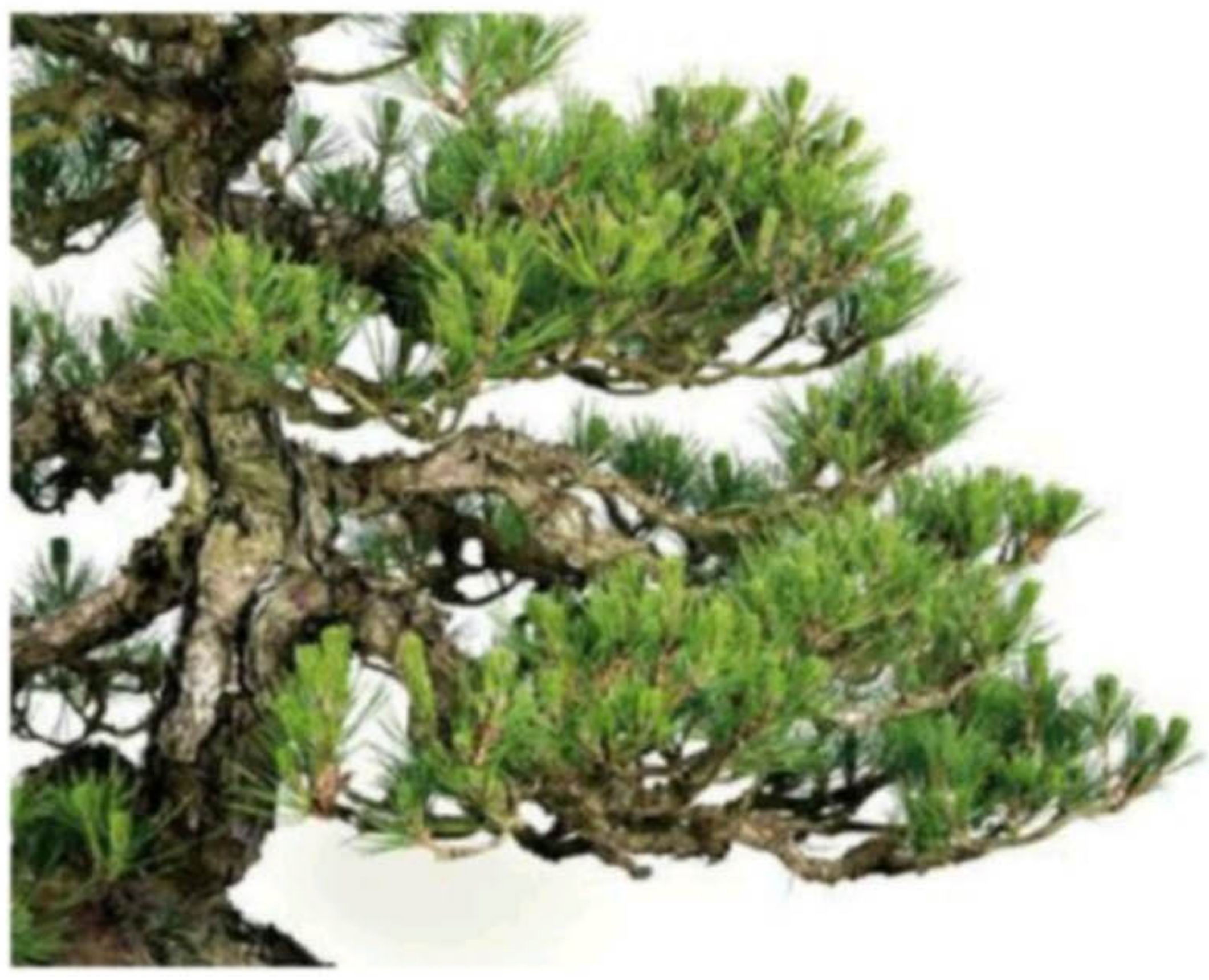


The full view of the new front after reversing front and back. The awkward taper in the trunk that lacked natural flow is now much less noticeable

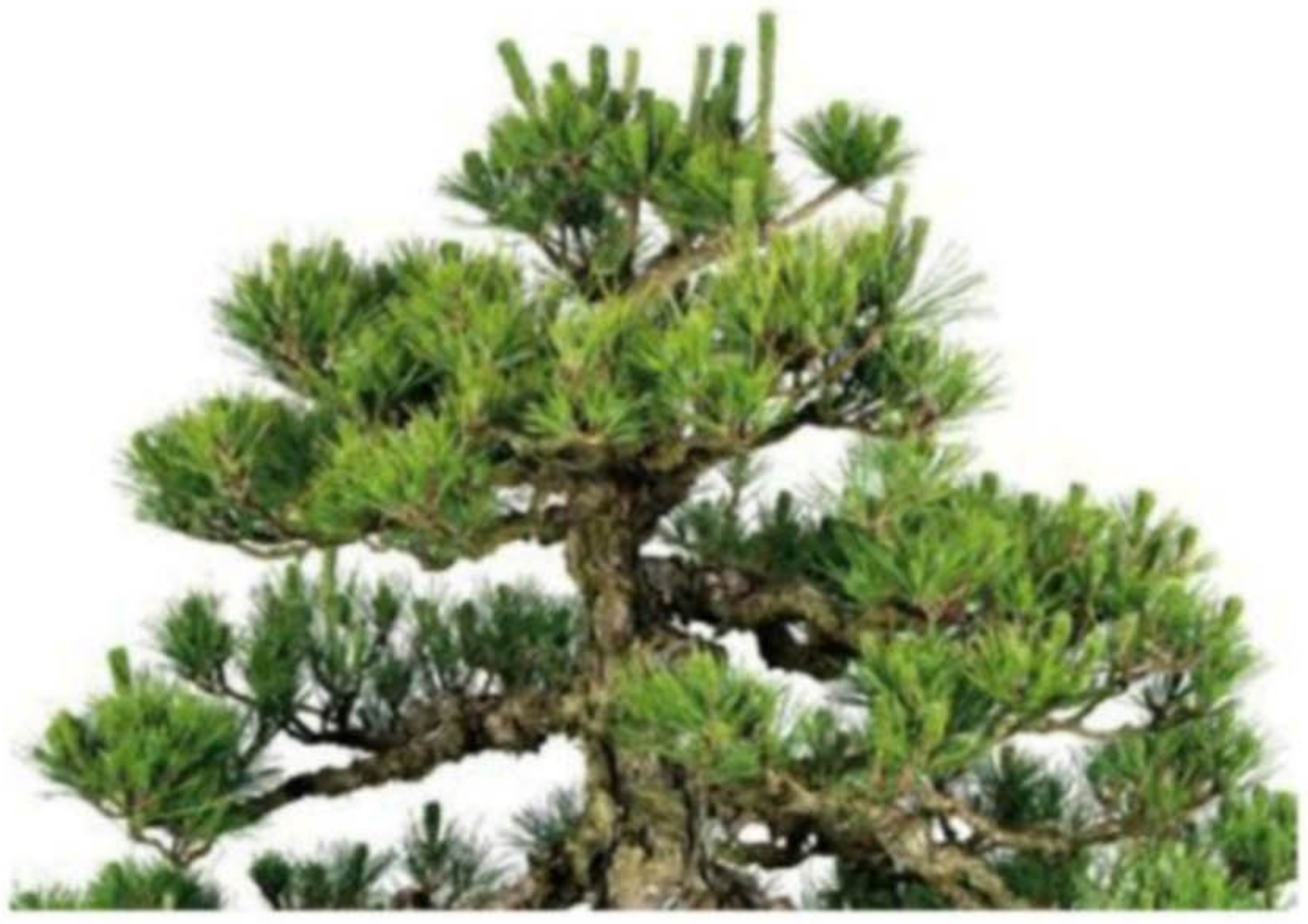
The lower trunk of the new front. The aged character, strength and movement of the trunk have all been preserved without compromise

Three important sections before the work begins

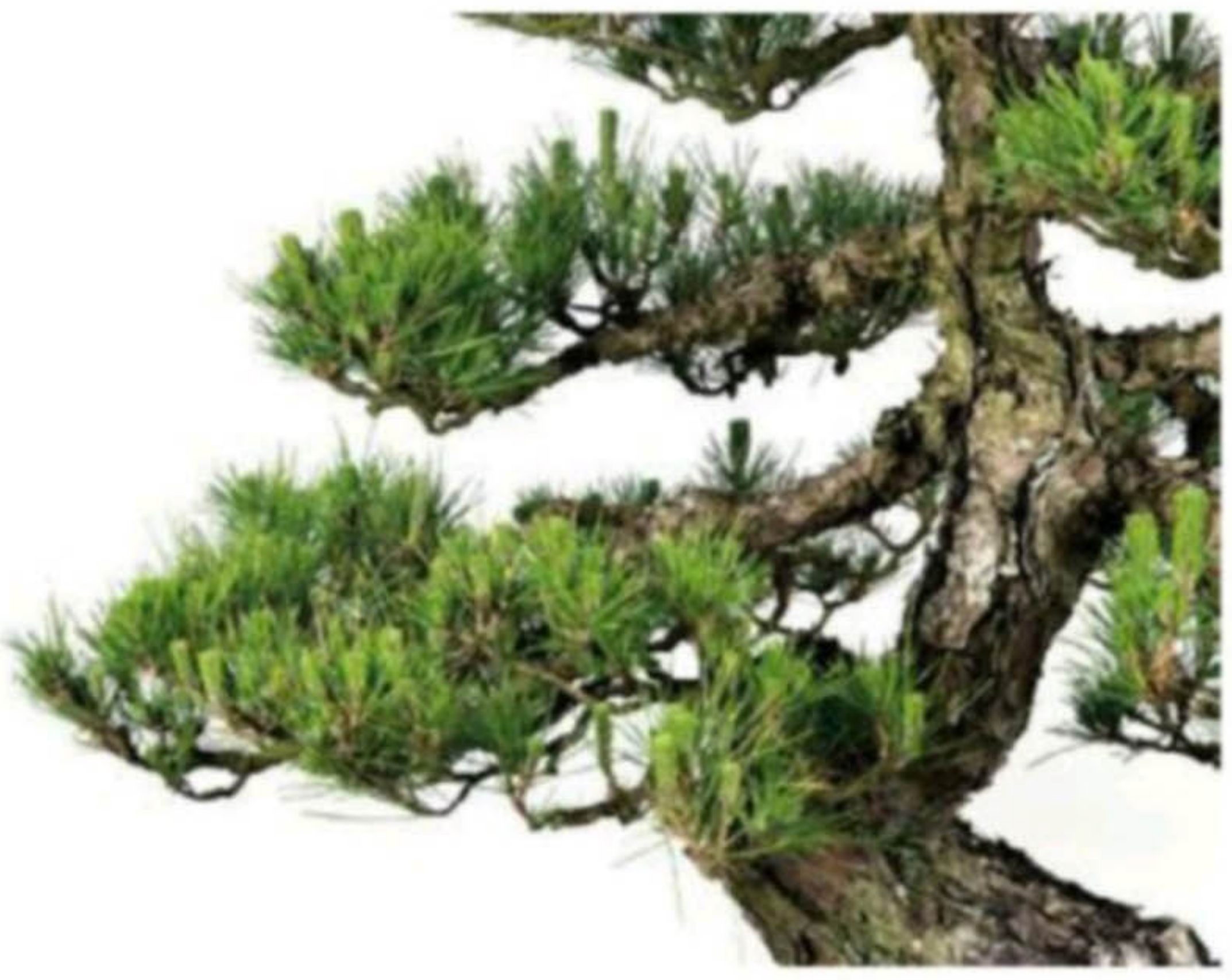
Even though the front and back have been reversed, the role of each part remains unchanged. Before beginning the work, let's once again review the function of each section.



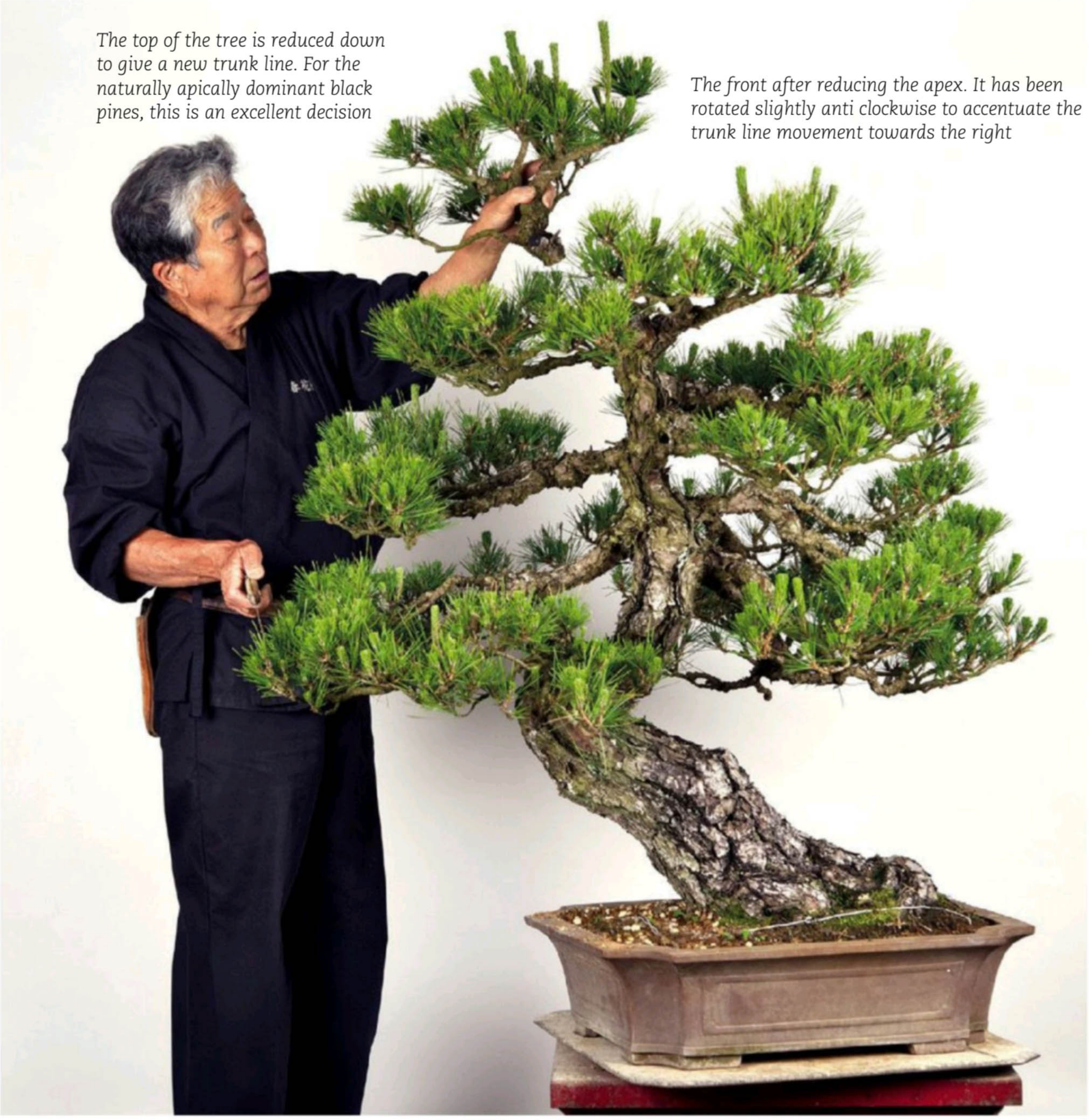
The lower right branch group before work begins, viewed from the new front. This looks like it will remain the main character branch



The apex area from the new front. The main trunk line is a little monotonous and feels as though it is returning towards the left



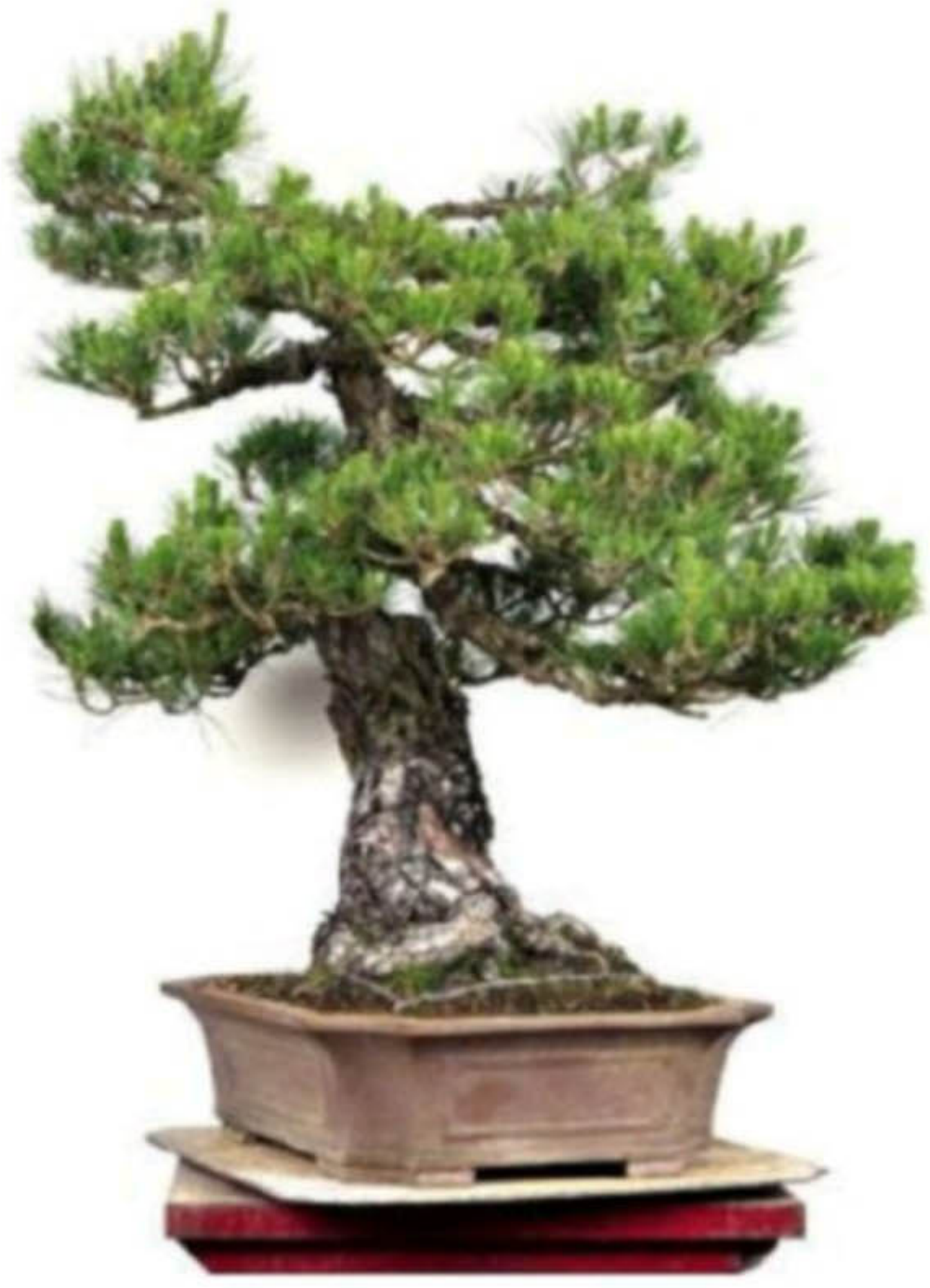
The lower left branch group. As a balance branch it feels as though it is too powerful and as though it needs to be tightened up a little



The top of the tree is reduced down to give a new trunk line. For the naturally apically dominant black pines, this is an excellent decision

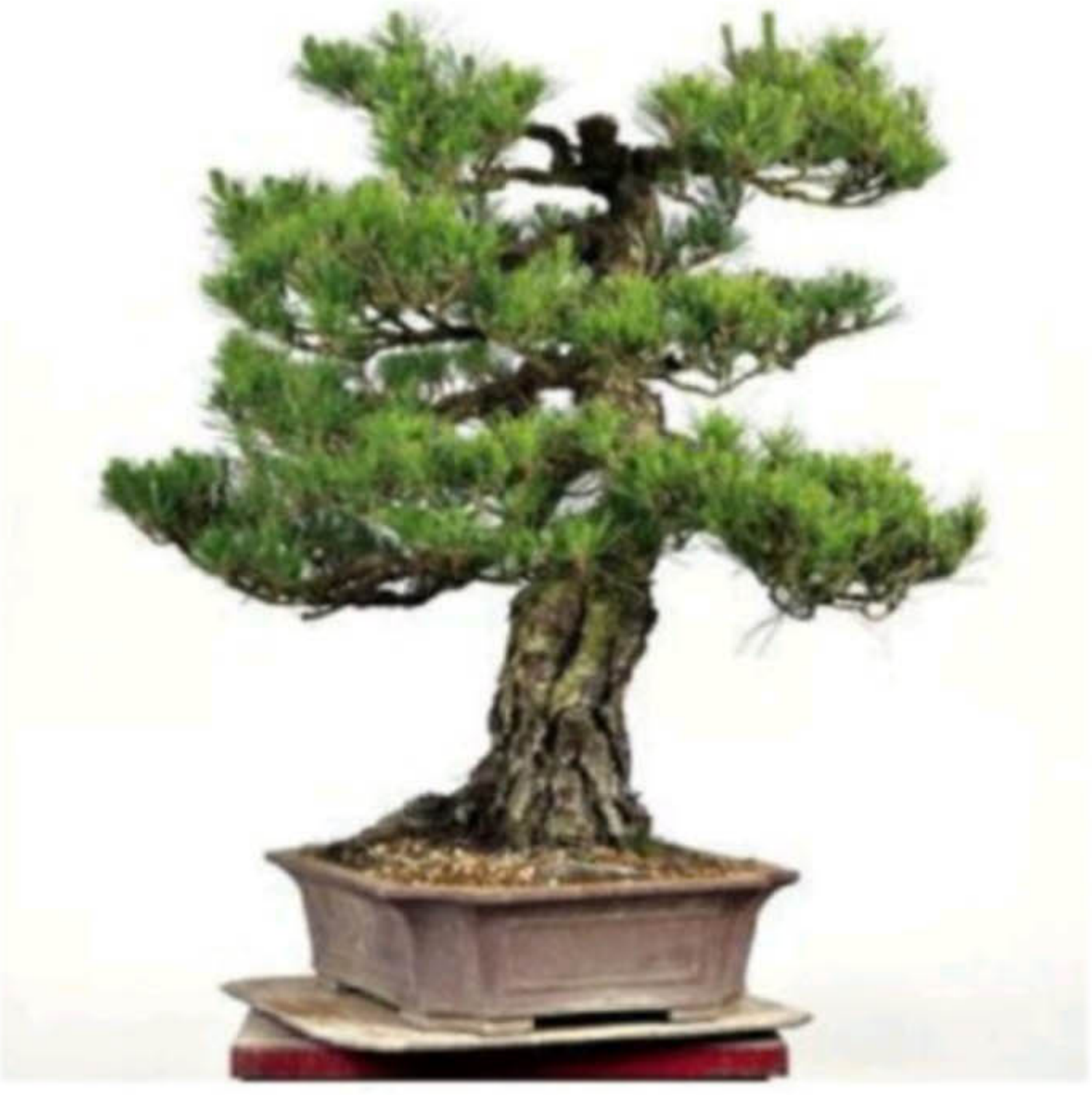
The front after reducing the apex. It has been rotated slightly anti clockwise to accentuate the trunk line movement towards the right

Both sides after the apex reduction



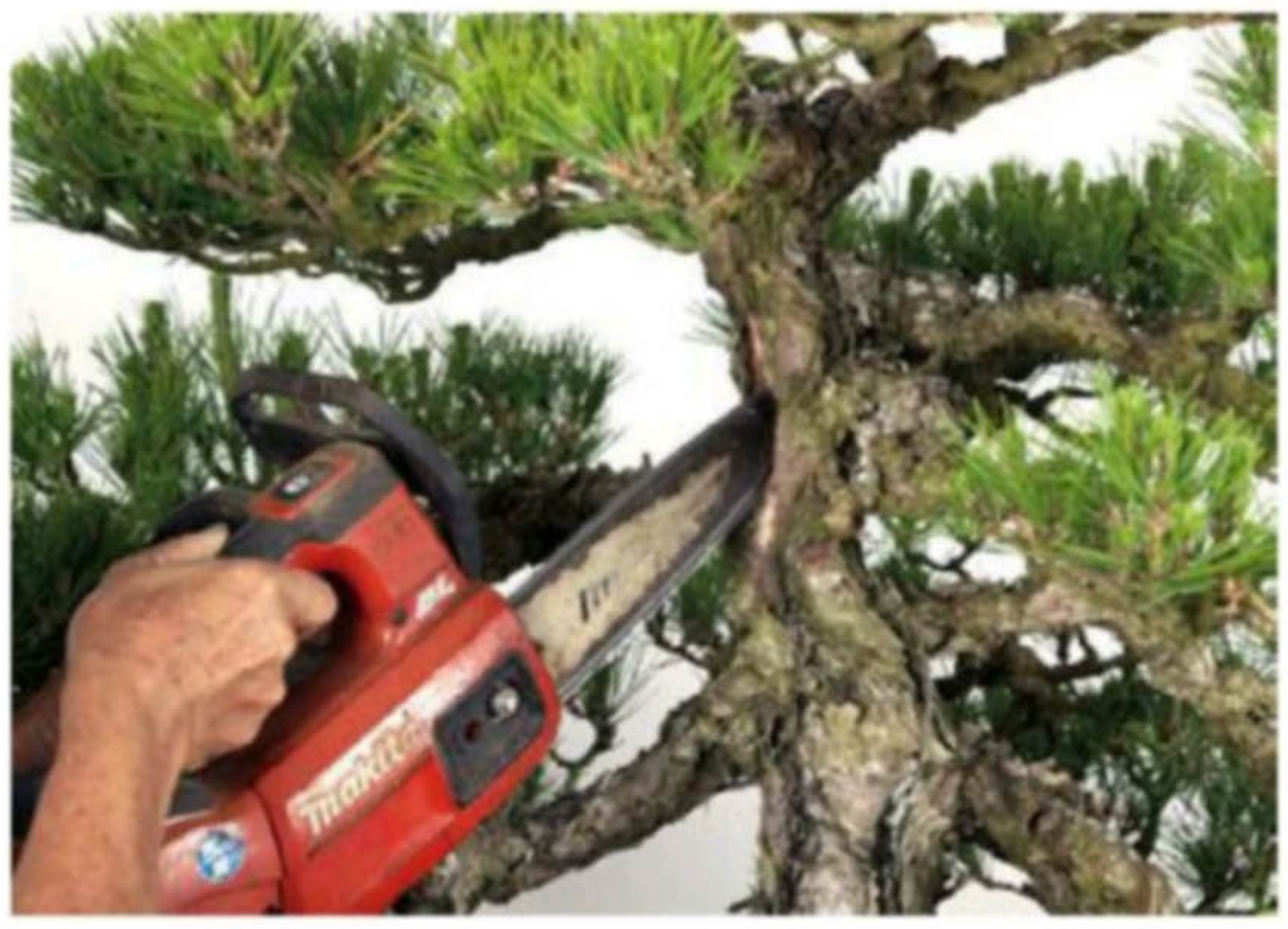
The right-hand side after the apex reduction

The left-hand side after the reduction



May 28, 2022
Core removal for trunk bending

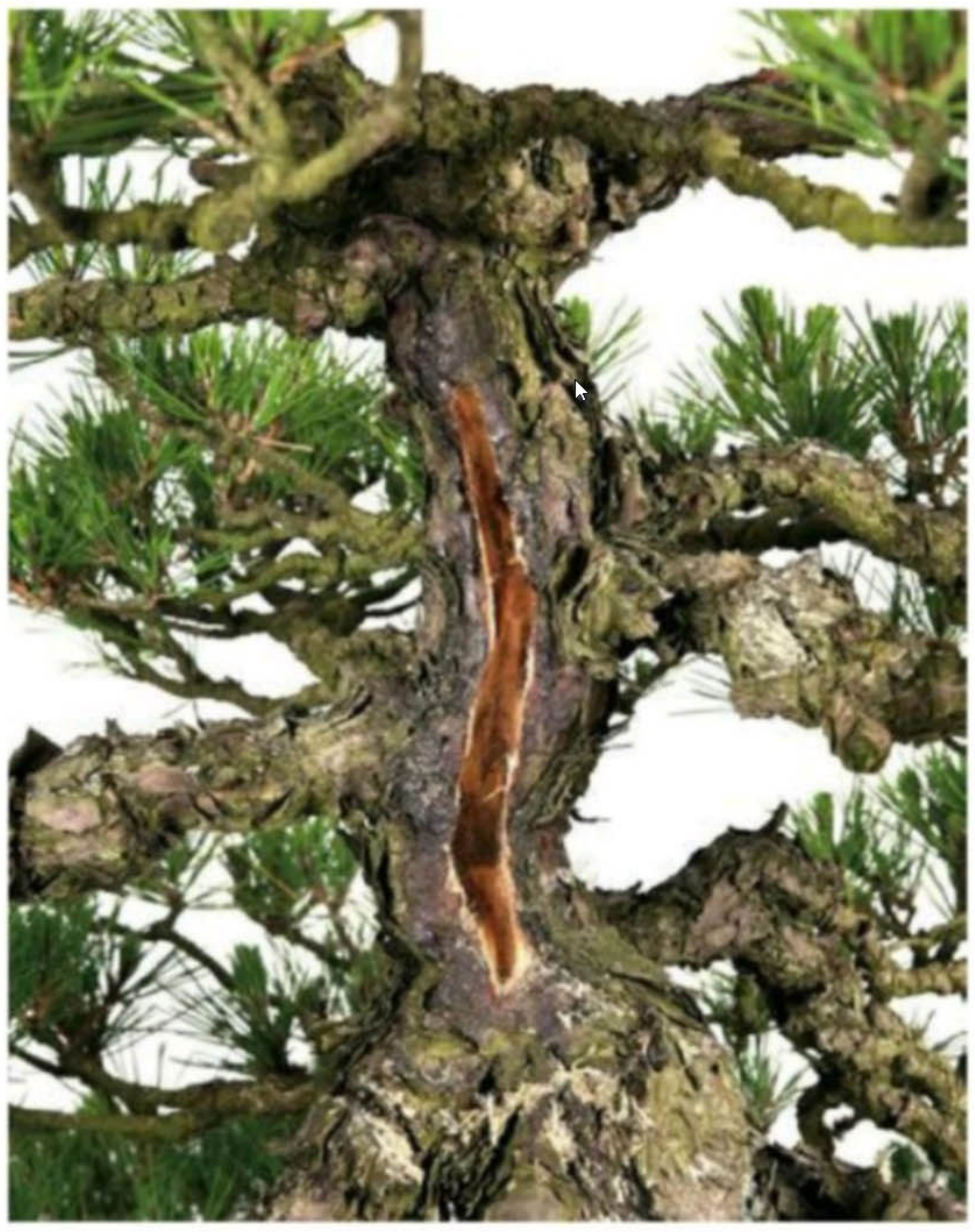
Kunio Kobayashi, confident in the resilience of black pine, even in the apex, prepared a chainsaw and began removing the core to bend the upper trunk.



One wrong move, and the entire apex could be lost as there is no replacement branch. Relying on experience and intuition, the core is carefully removed

Even though it's the upper trunk leading to the apex, bending a trunk nearly 3 cm thick is no easy task

With the intended direction of bending in mind, the chainsaw finally roared into life

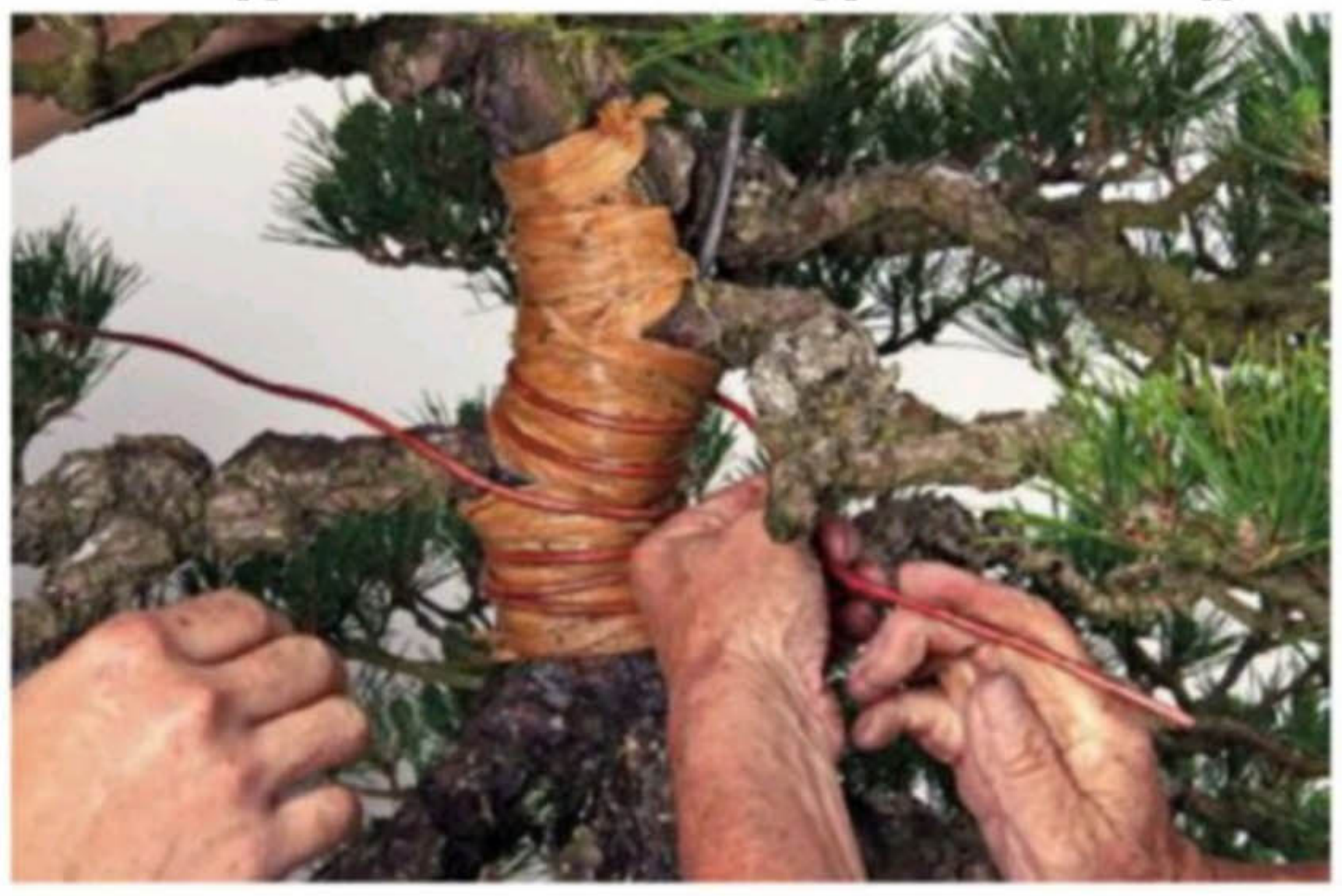


Following the natural flow of the trunk, the core was removed with both caution and boldness. A question remains — will the trunk really bend now?

Preparation for upper trunk bending

Raffia is being tightly wrapped around the upper trunk by the Master, while his apprentice, Wu-kun, in perfect sync with him, packs sphagnum moss into the wounds left by the core removal

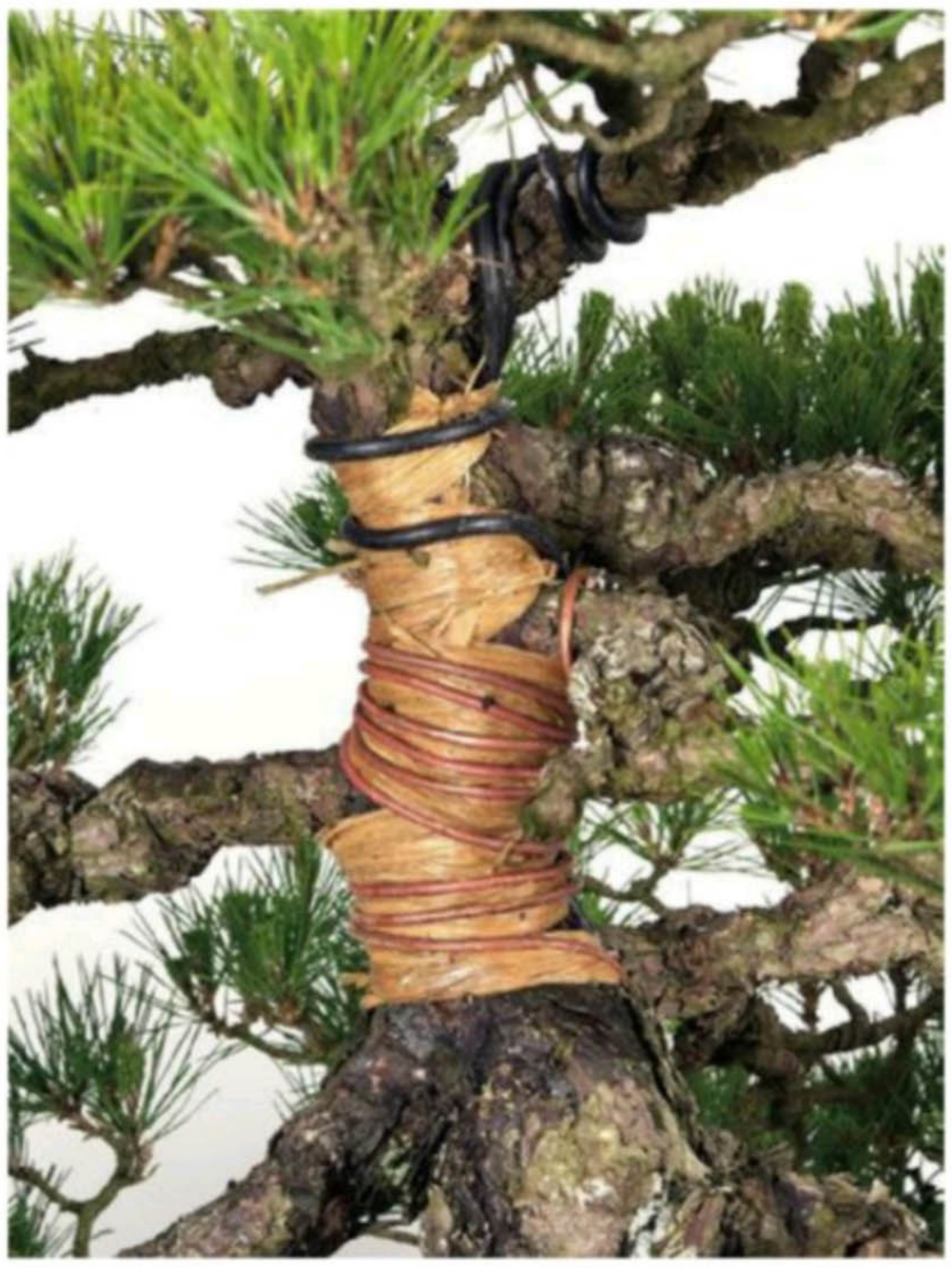
Two aluminium wires are aligned along the trunk, and raffia is then wrapped over them. After this, a No 10 copper wire is double-wrapped over the raffia



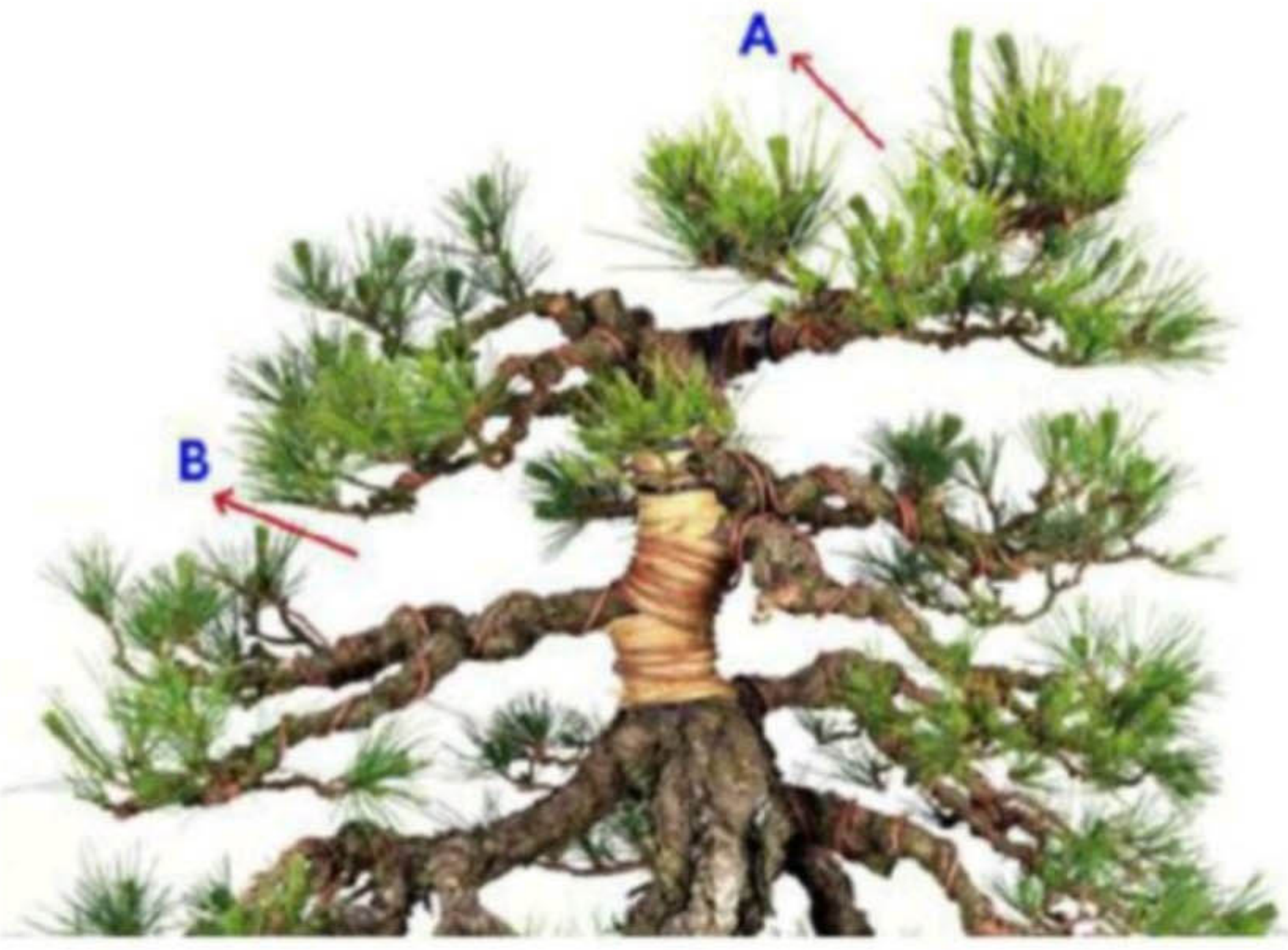
One end of the copper wire, used to protect the now hollowed-out trunk section, is wound up into the apex

The other end of the copper wire is wound on to the right primary branch, which needs to be lowered slightly

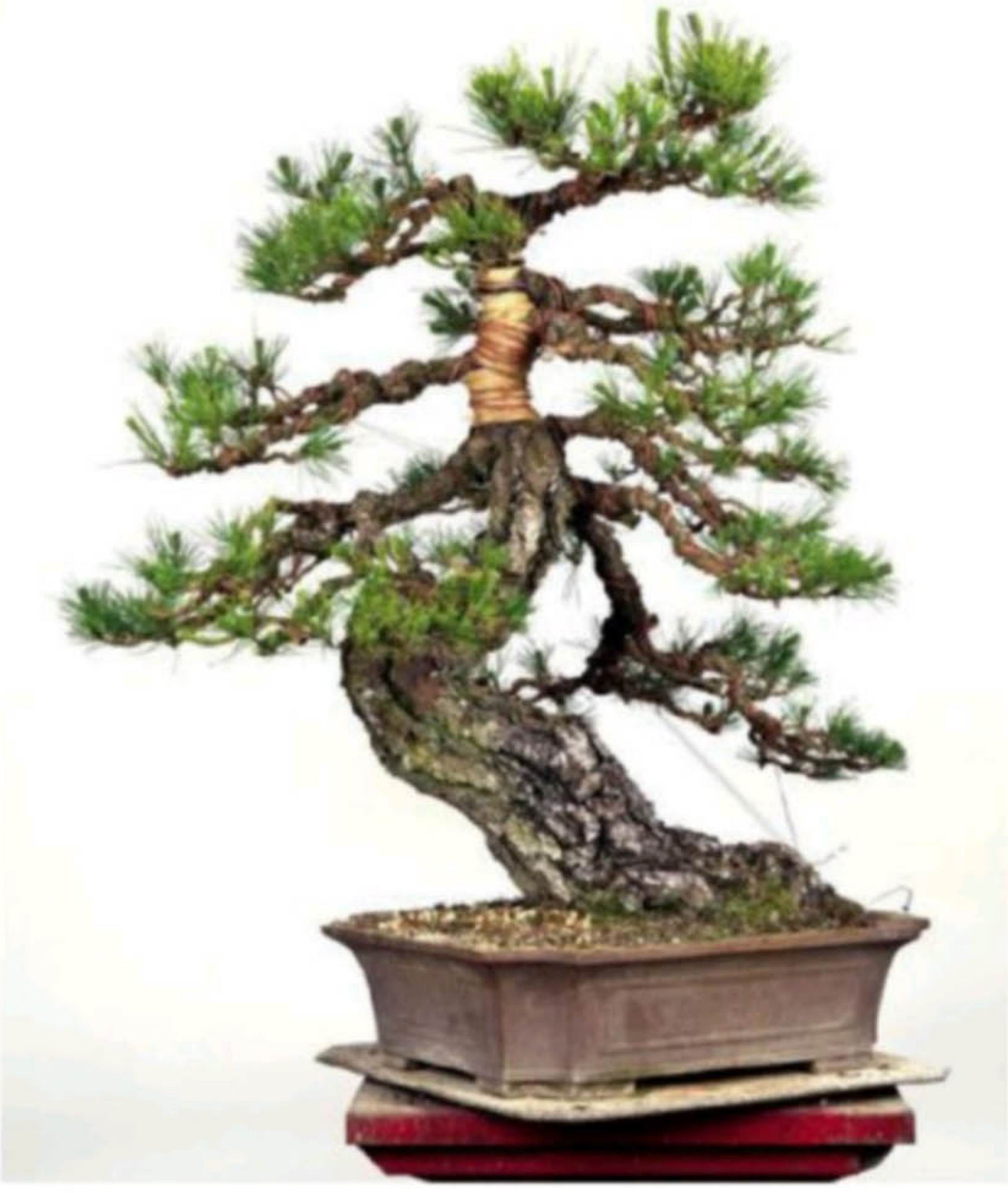
Aluminium wire is then wrapped round the branches of the apex. The preparation for bending the trunk is now complete. From here on, everything depends on the Master's control and experience



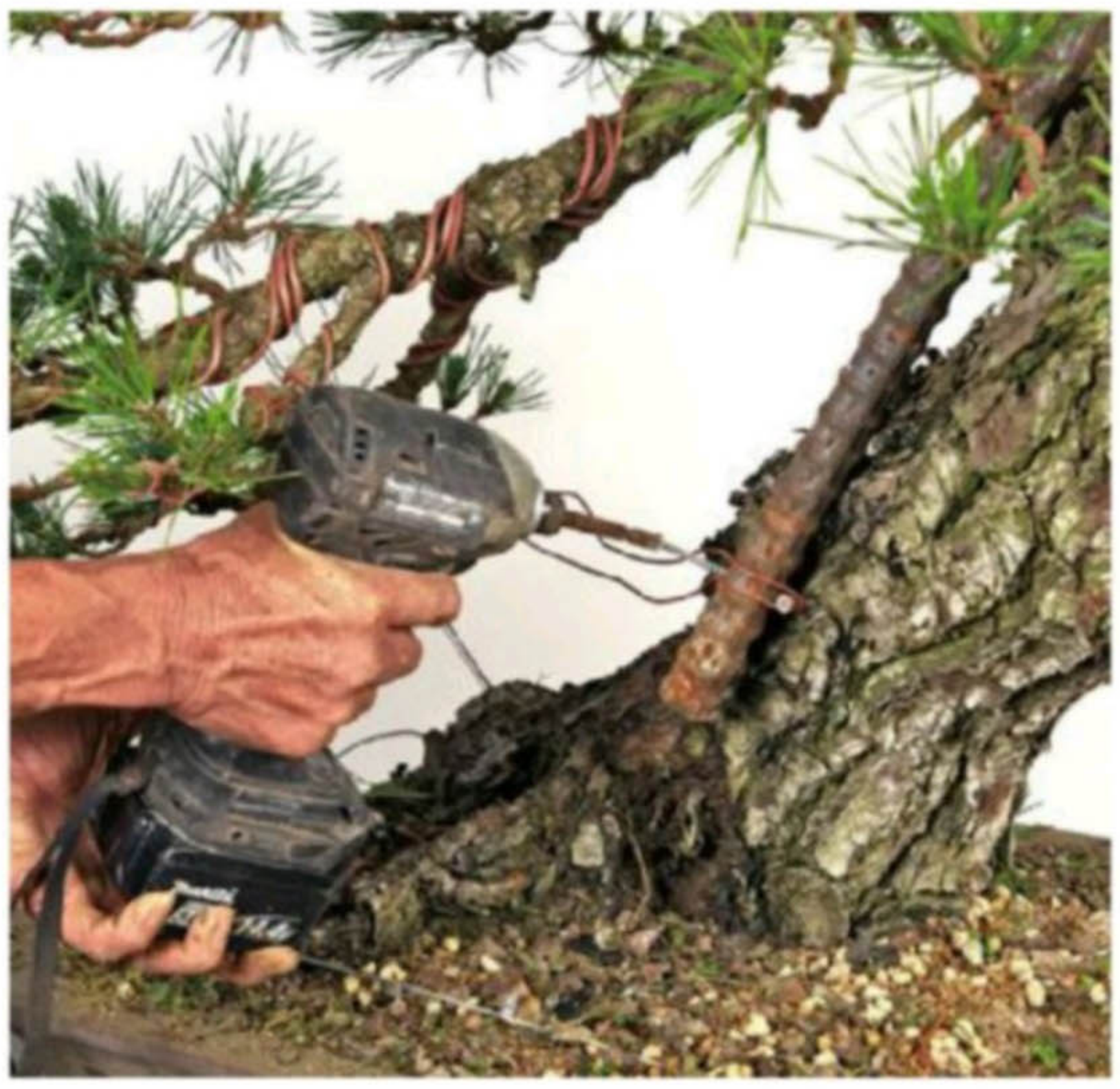
The apex is carefully moved up



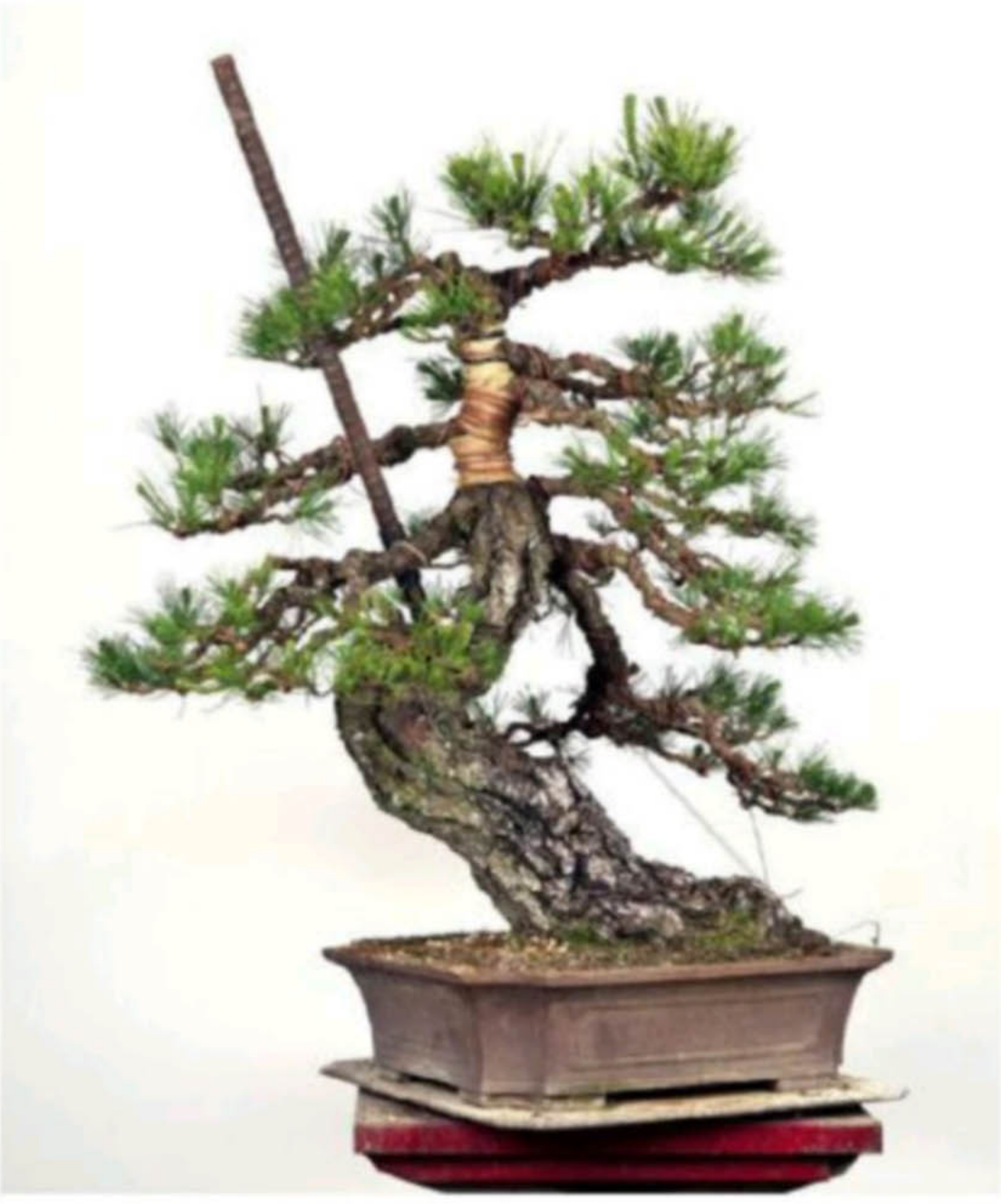
Trying out the trunk bending idea. The greatest challenge lies in how far the upper trunk B, wrapped in raffia, can be brought back to the left — and how much the trunk apex A can be raised upright



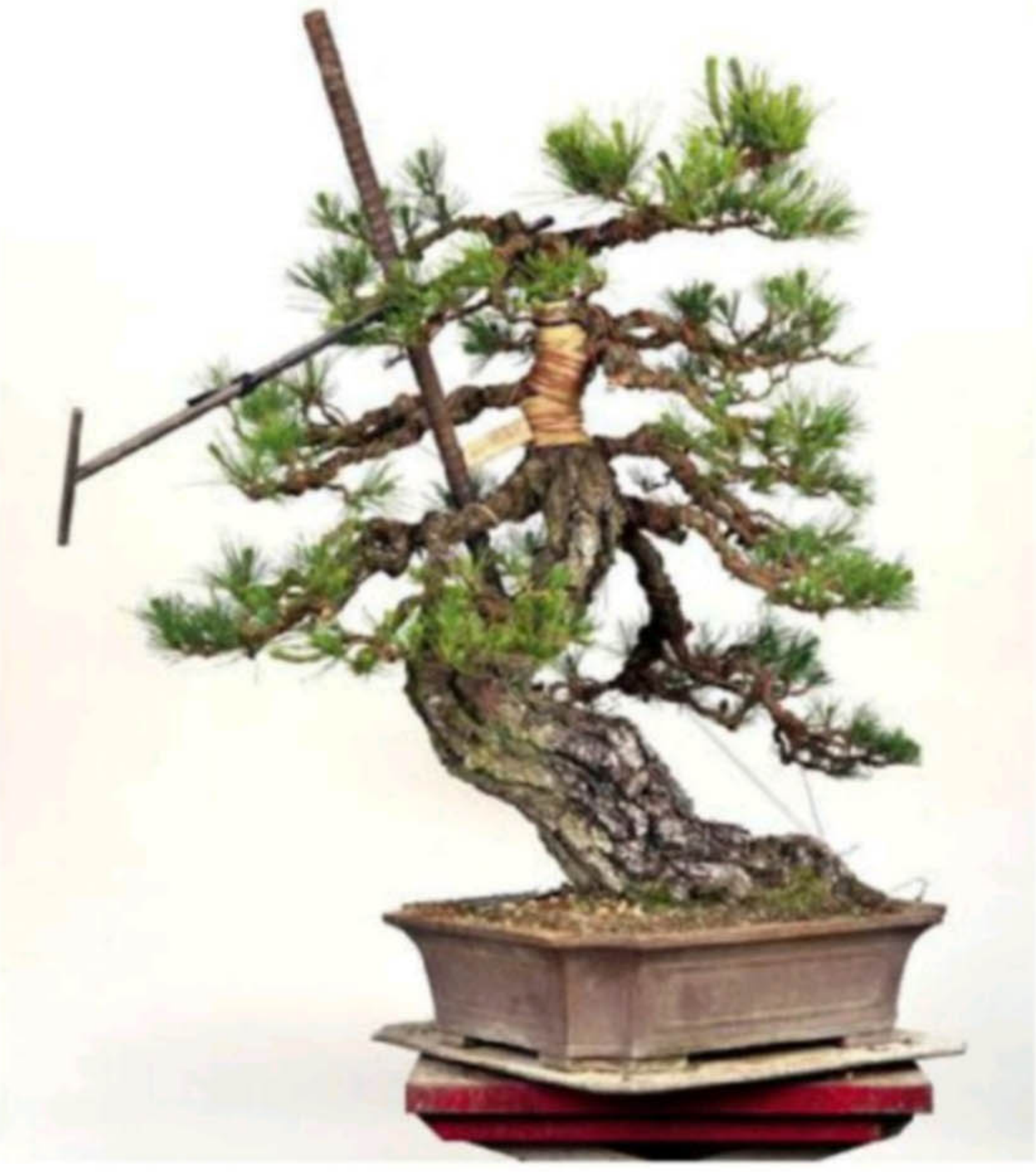
The front before trunk bending



An iron bar is set at the back of the tree



The front after setting the iron bar in place

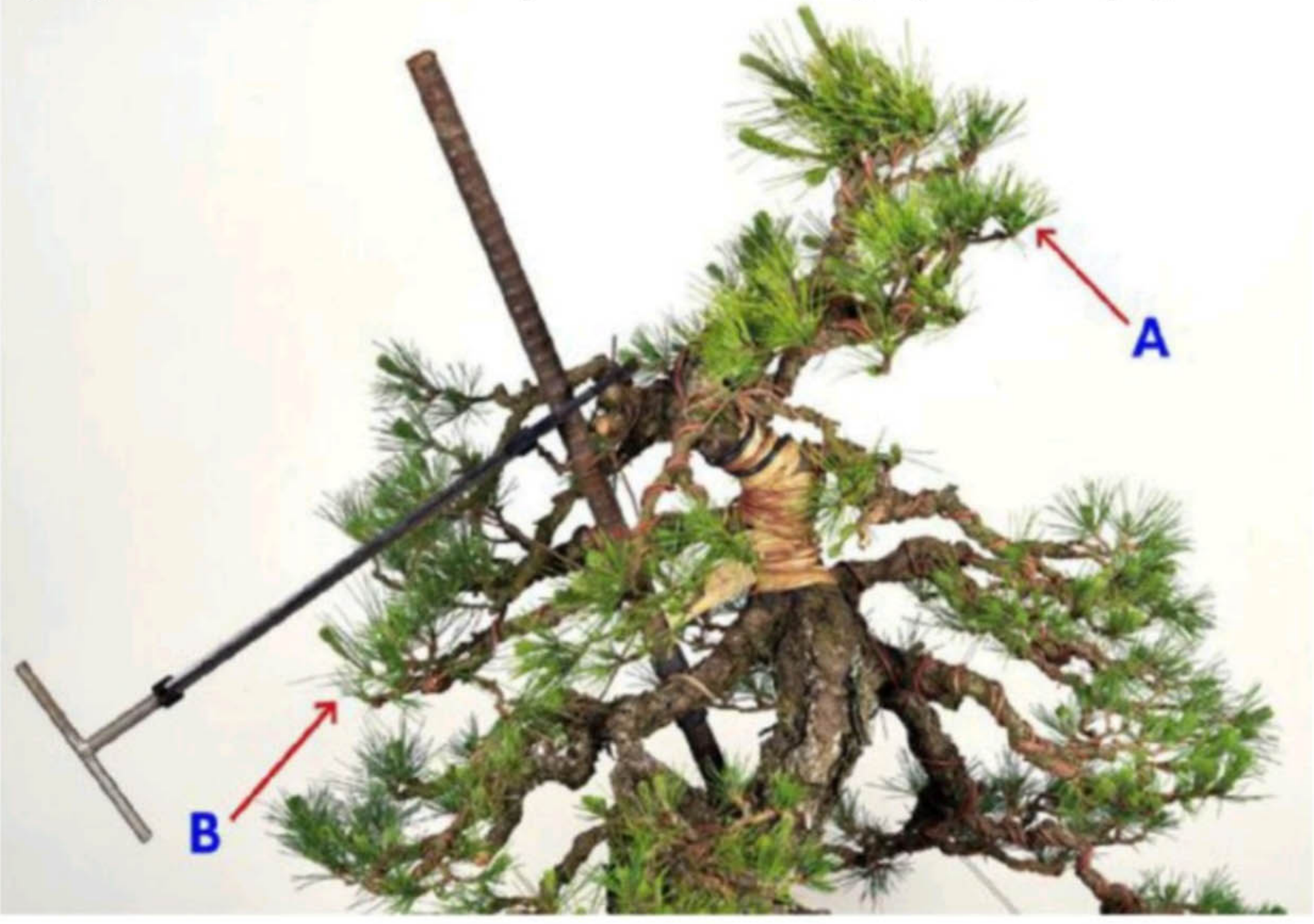


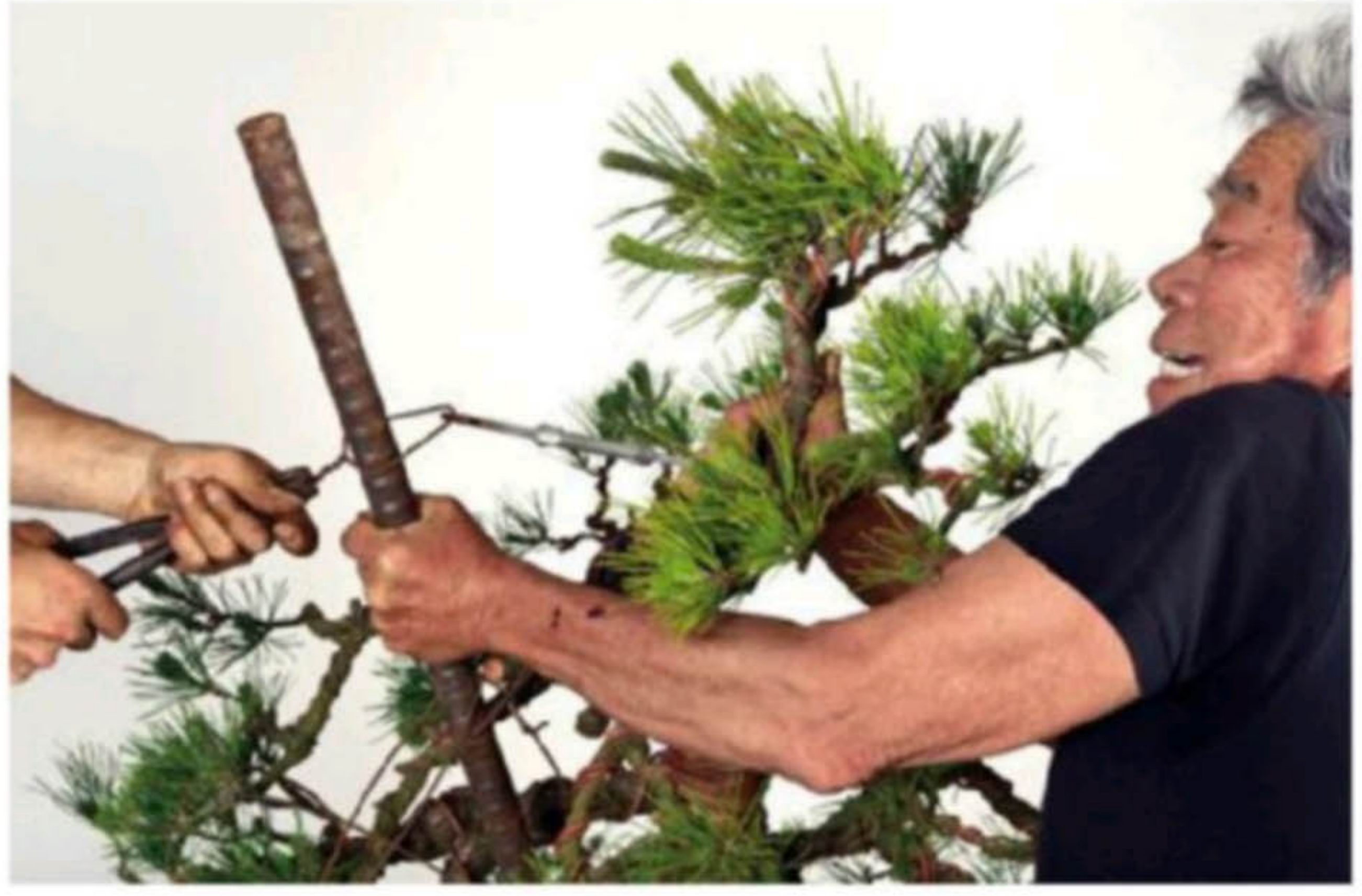
Note position of the jack, with care placed according to the desired bending points, and the wooden blocks protecting areas that should not be bent

Even the Master's cautiousness is evident in each careful turn of the jack. If the apex were to break, everything would be lost

Wu-kun, tightening the wire that loosened during the bend, also wears a focused and careful expression

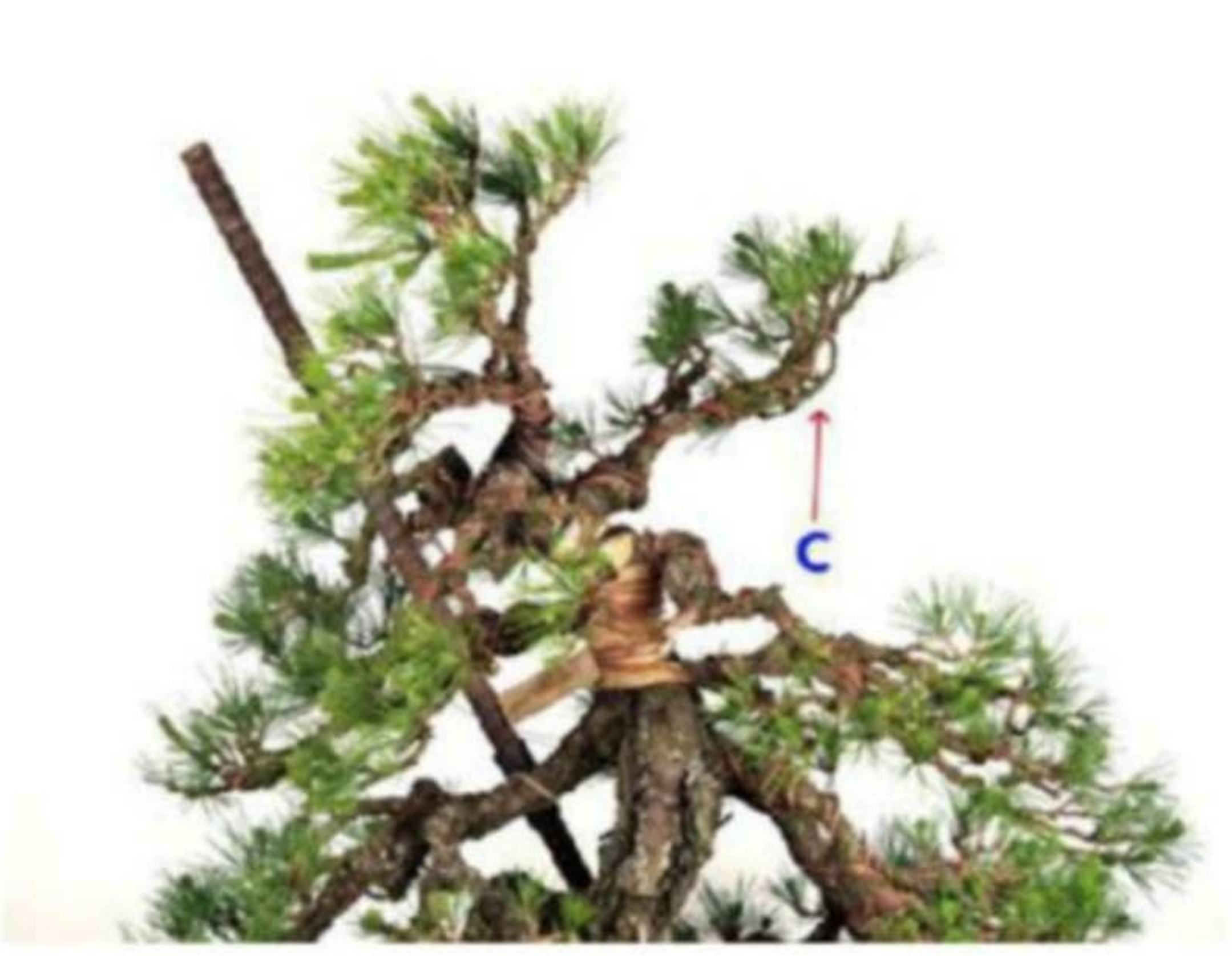
The top of the tree after the trunk has been bent. Compared to the photos from before, it's clear that the trunk apex has been successfully brought upright



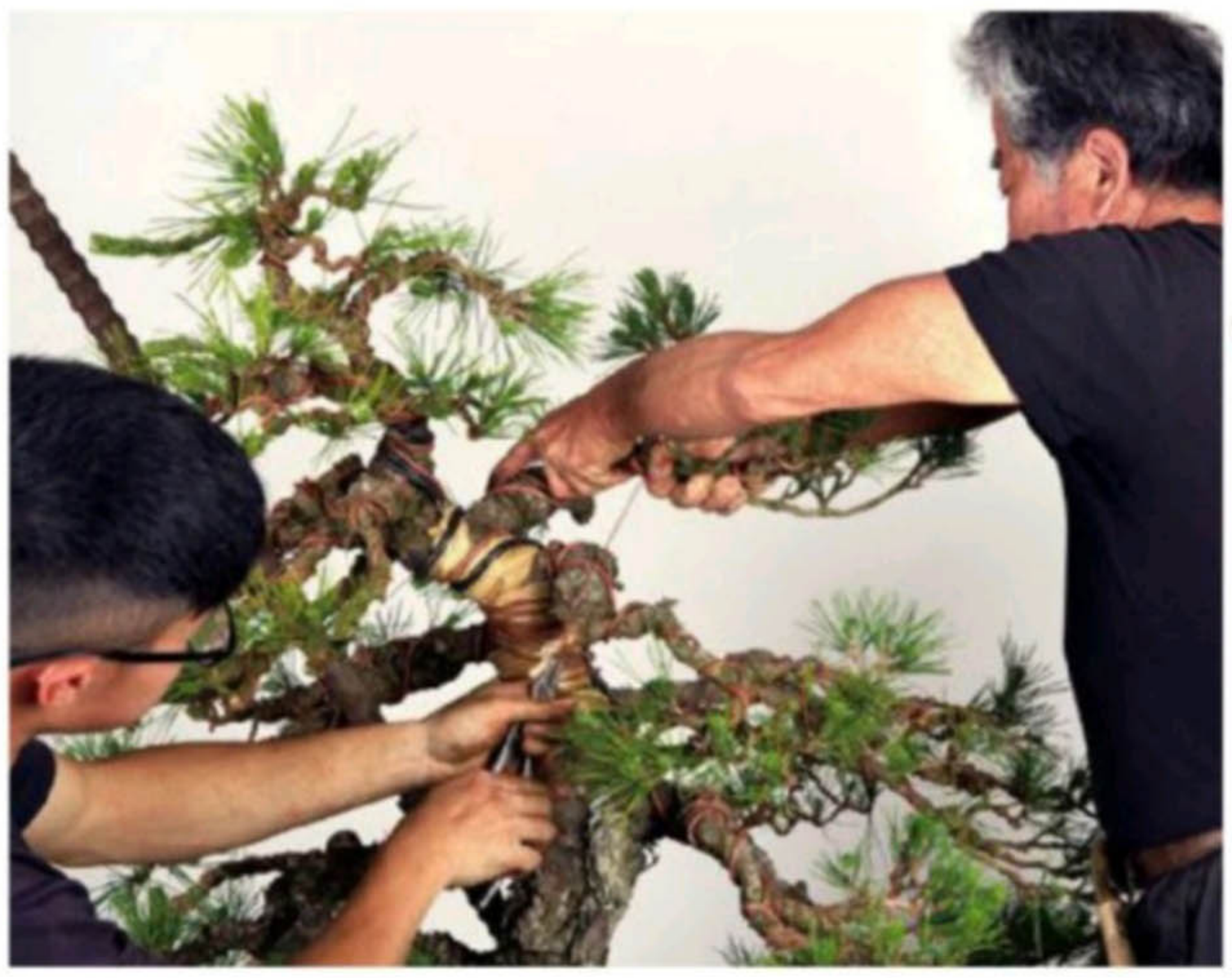


From here on, raising the trunk apex is a matter of delicate control. It's carefully tightened using a turnbuckle, pulling from the iron bar with precision

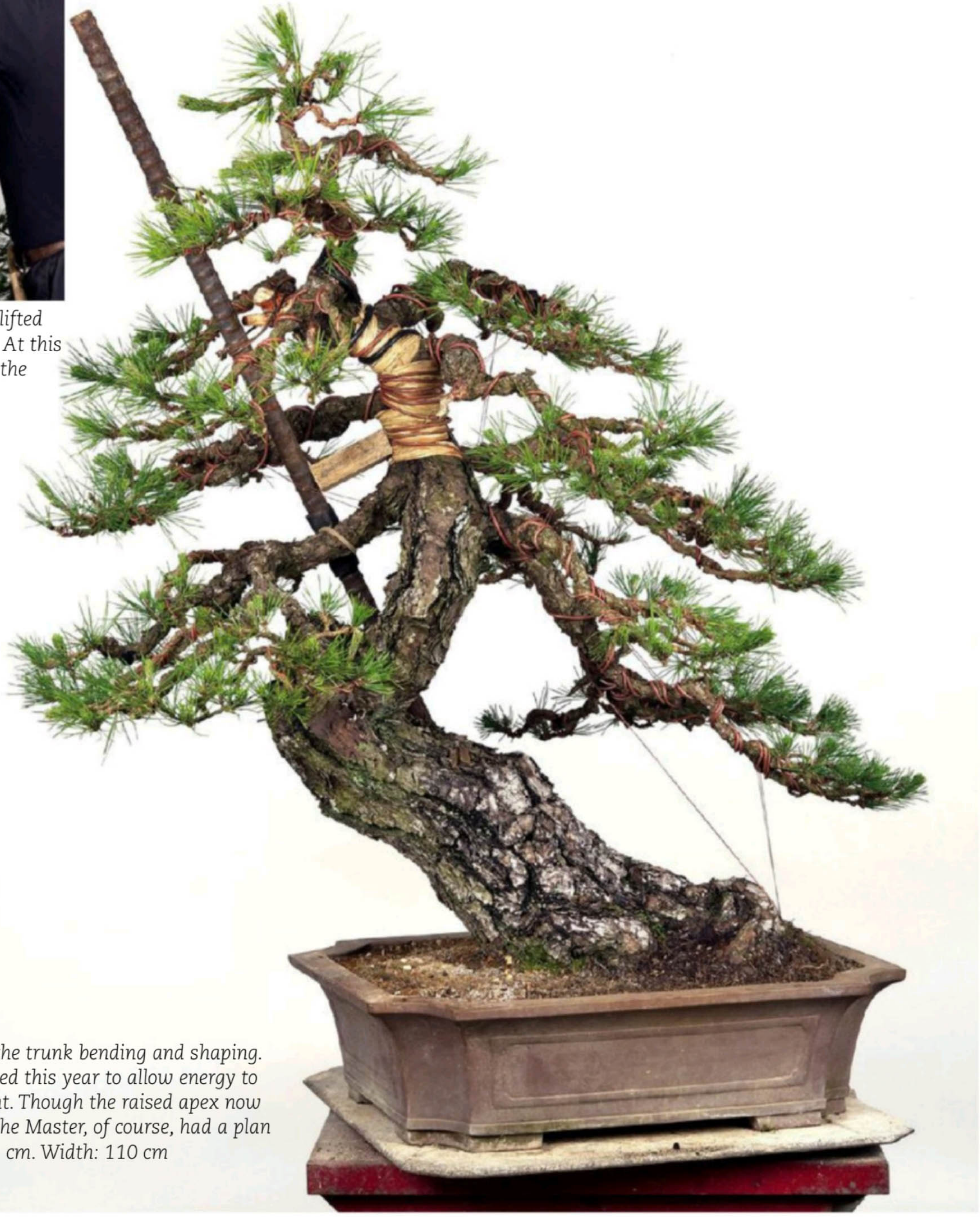
'One more turn,' says the Master, his voice heightening the tension for Wu-kun



After manipulating the trunk apex, it has been successfully lifted. However, as a result, the lower right branch C also rose unintentionally

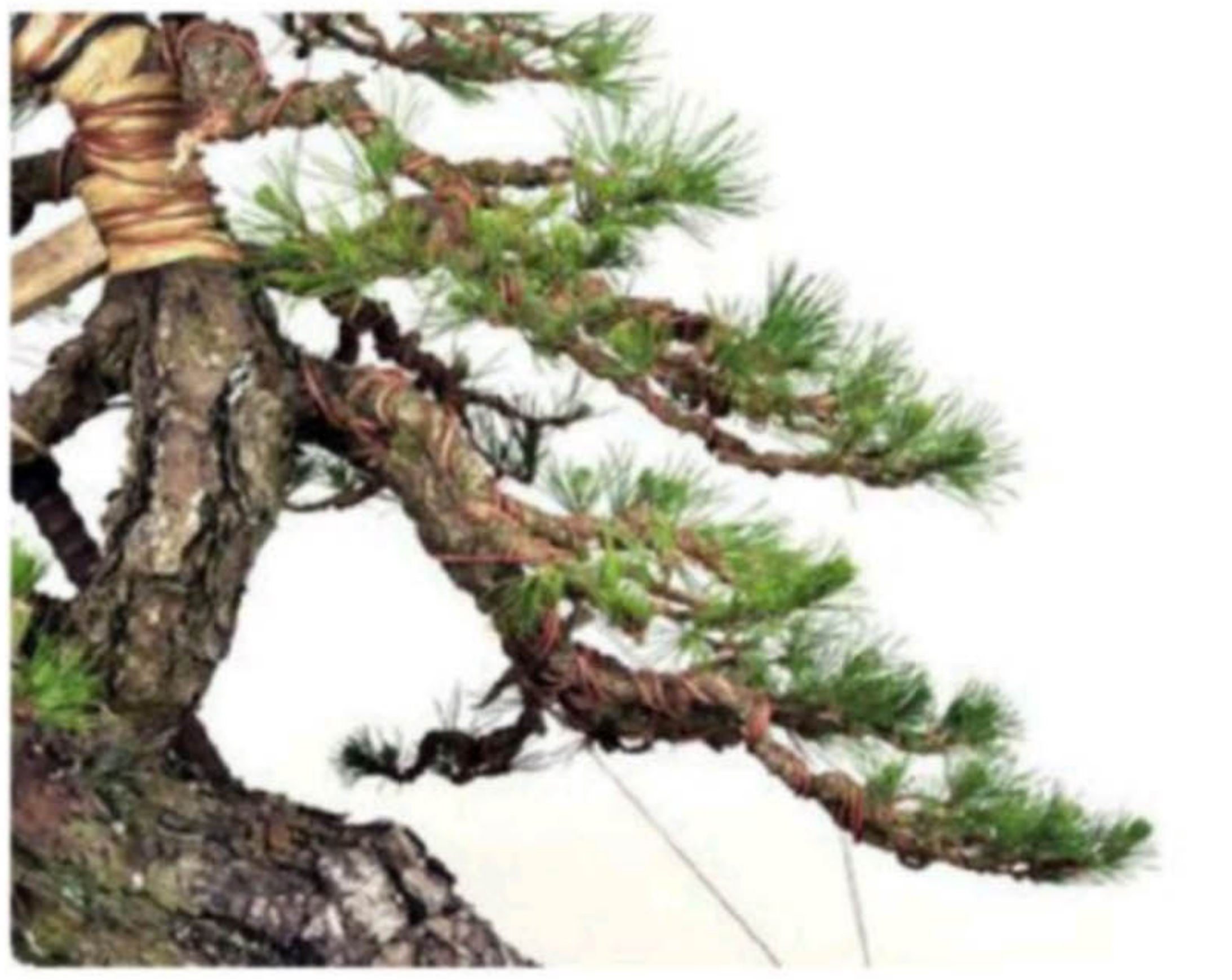


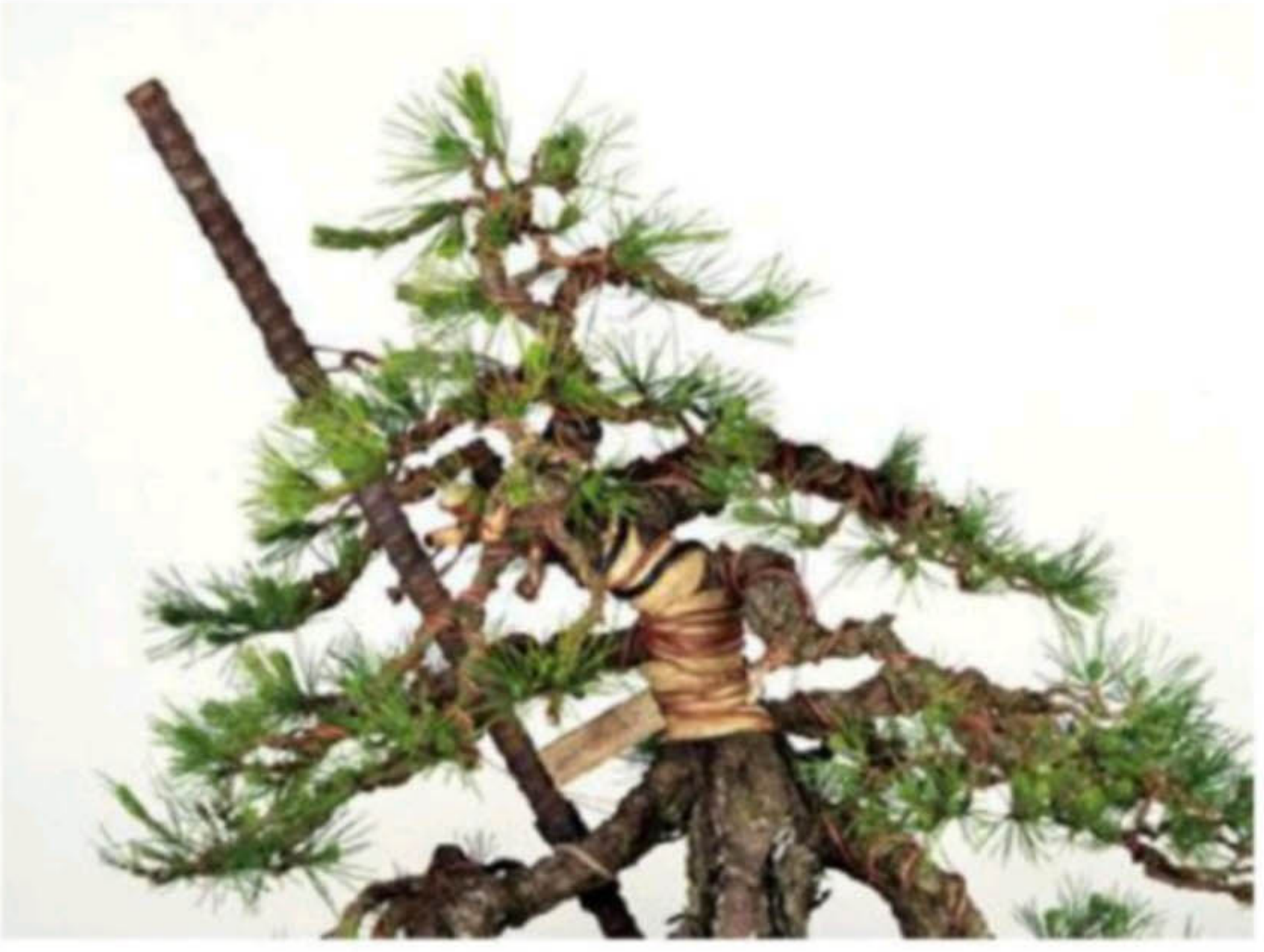
Finally, the lower right branch of the apex, which had lifted during the trunk-raising process, is pulled back down. At this point, only the Master's touch and intuition can guide the adjustment

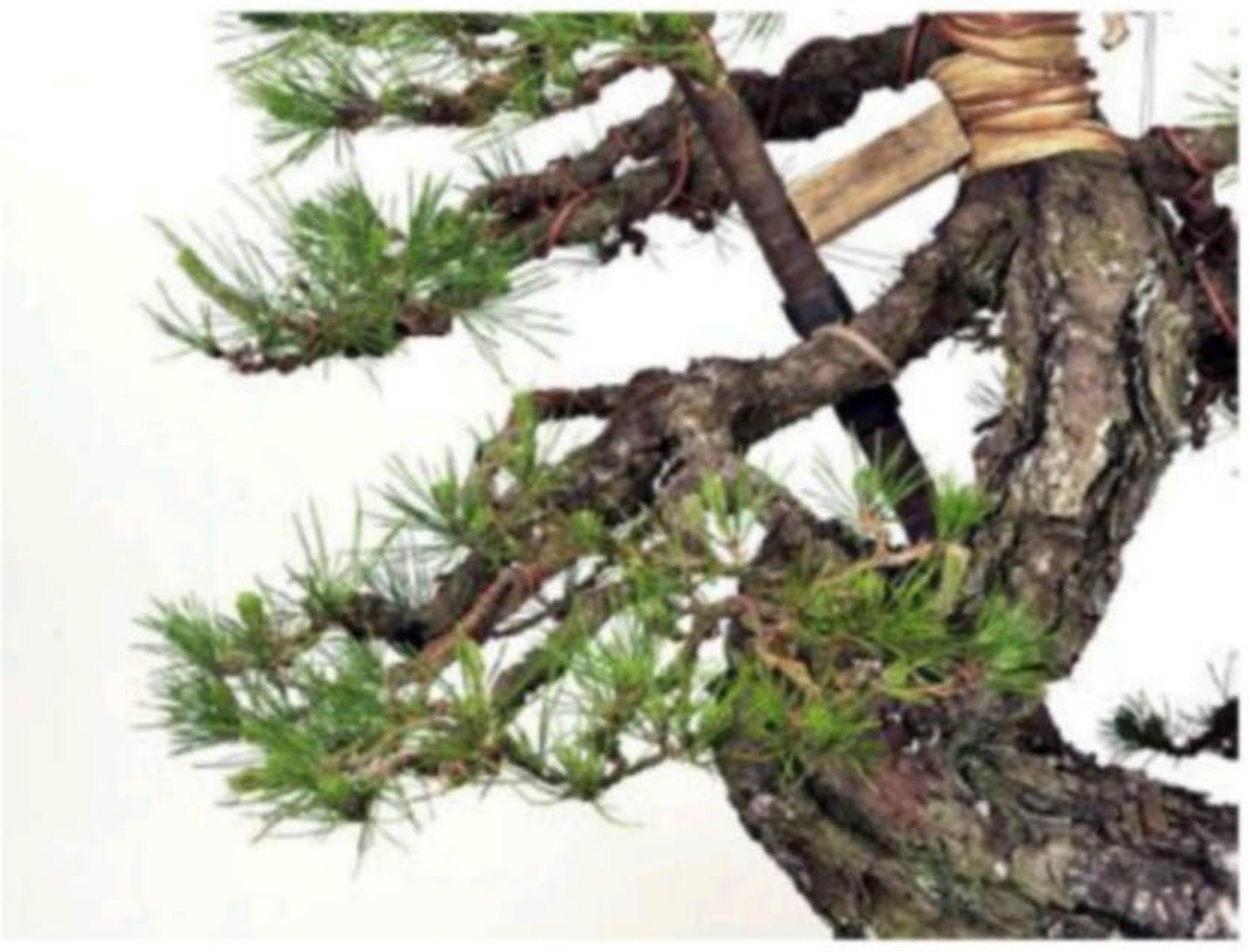


The full front view after the trunk bending and shaping. Candle cutting was skipped this year to allow energy to build for future refinement. Though the raised apex now leans slightly to the left, the Master, of course, had a plan in mind. Tree height: 111 cm. Width: 110 cm

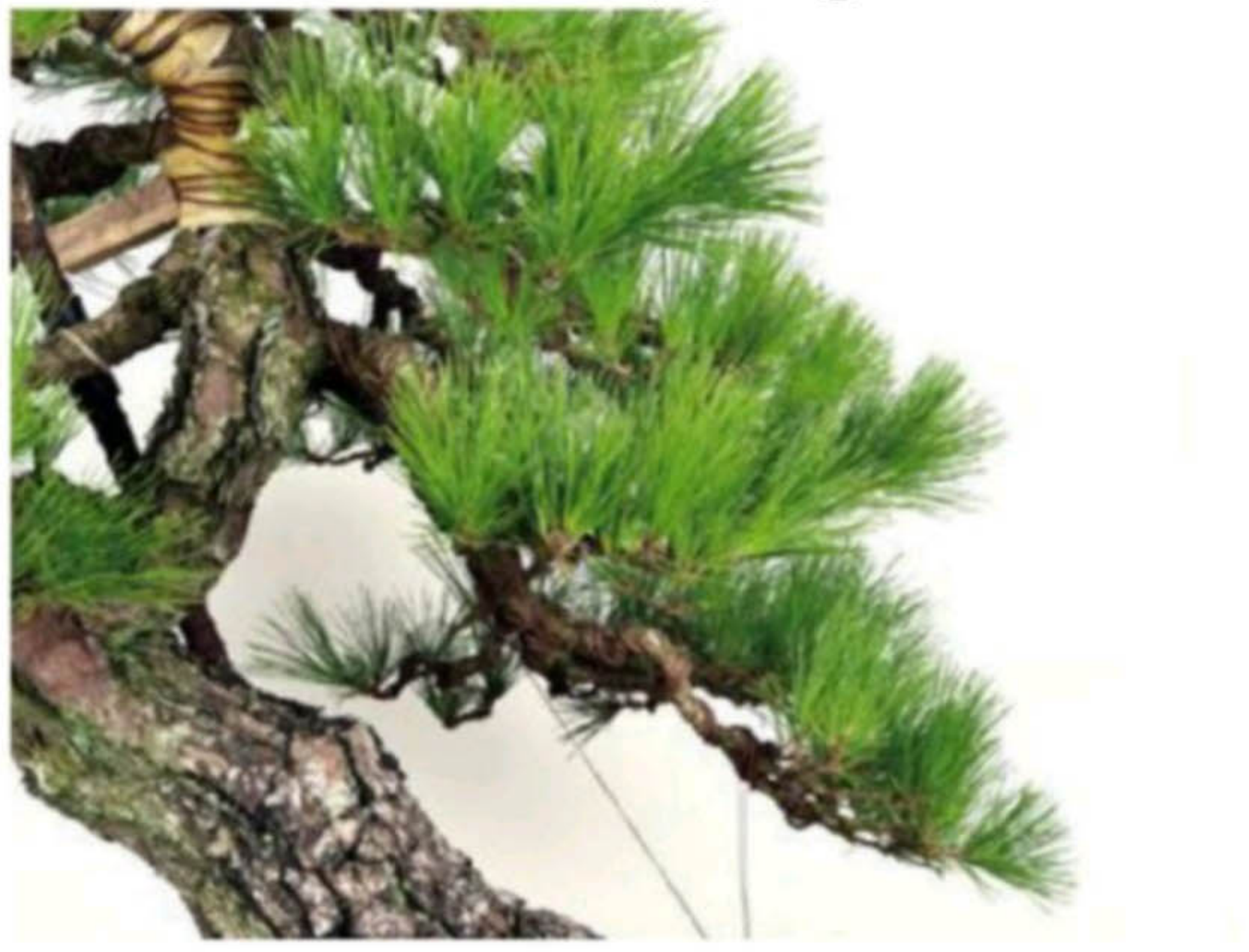
The three sections after trunk bending. (28th May 2022)

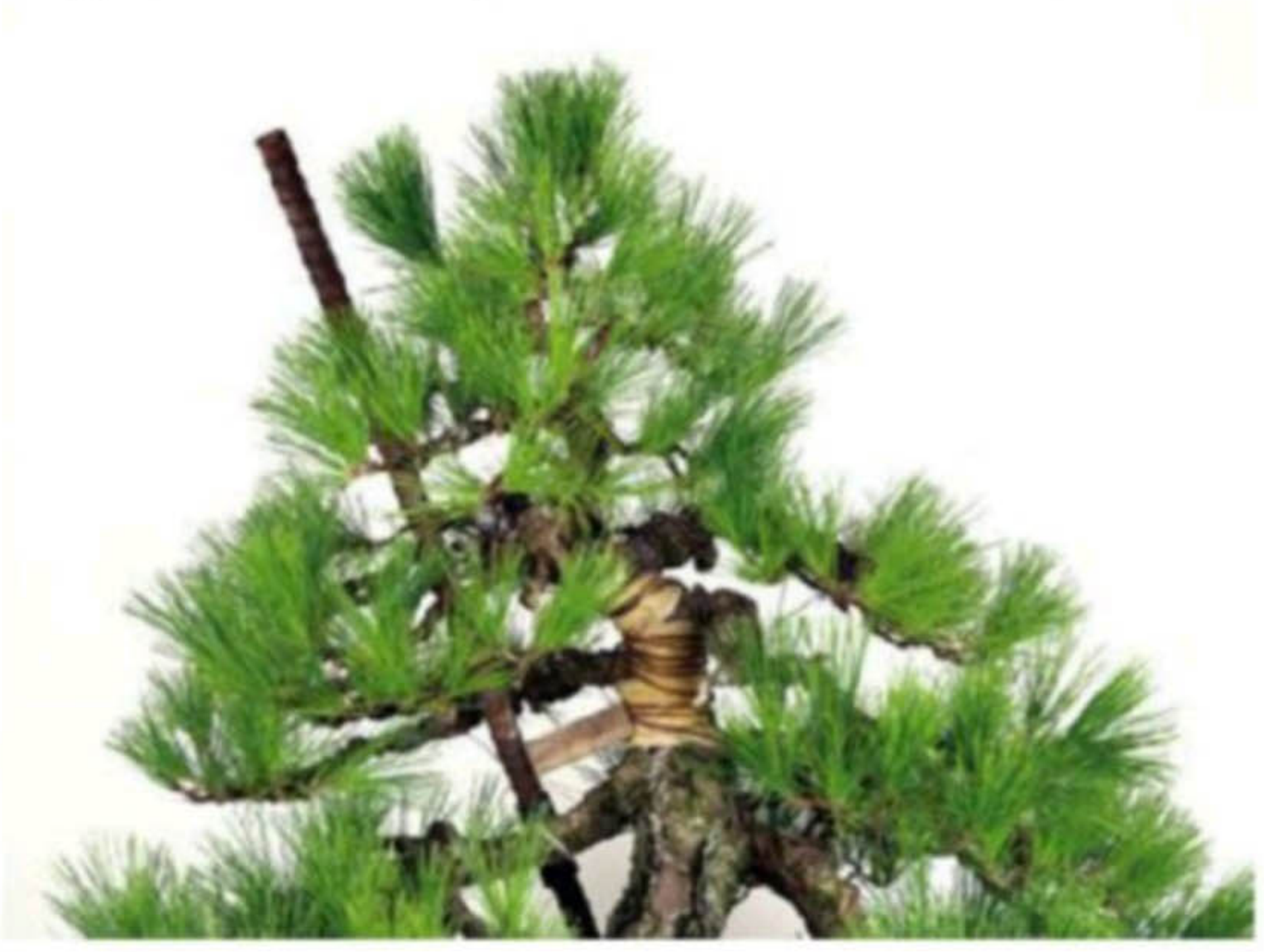

Lower right branch after styling. The first right branch was utilized effectively as a key character branch

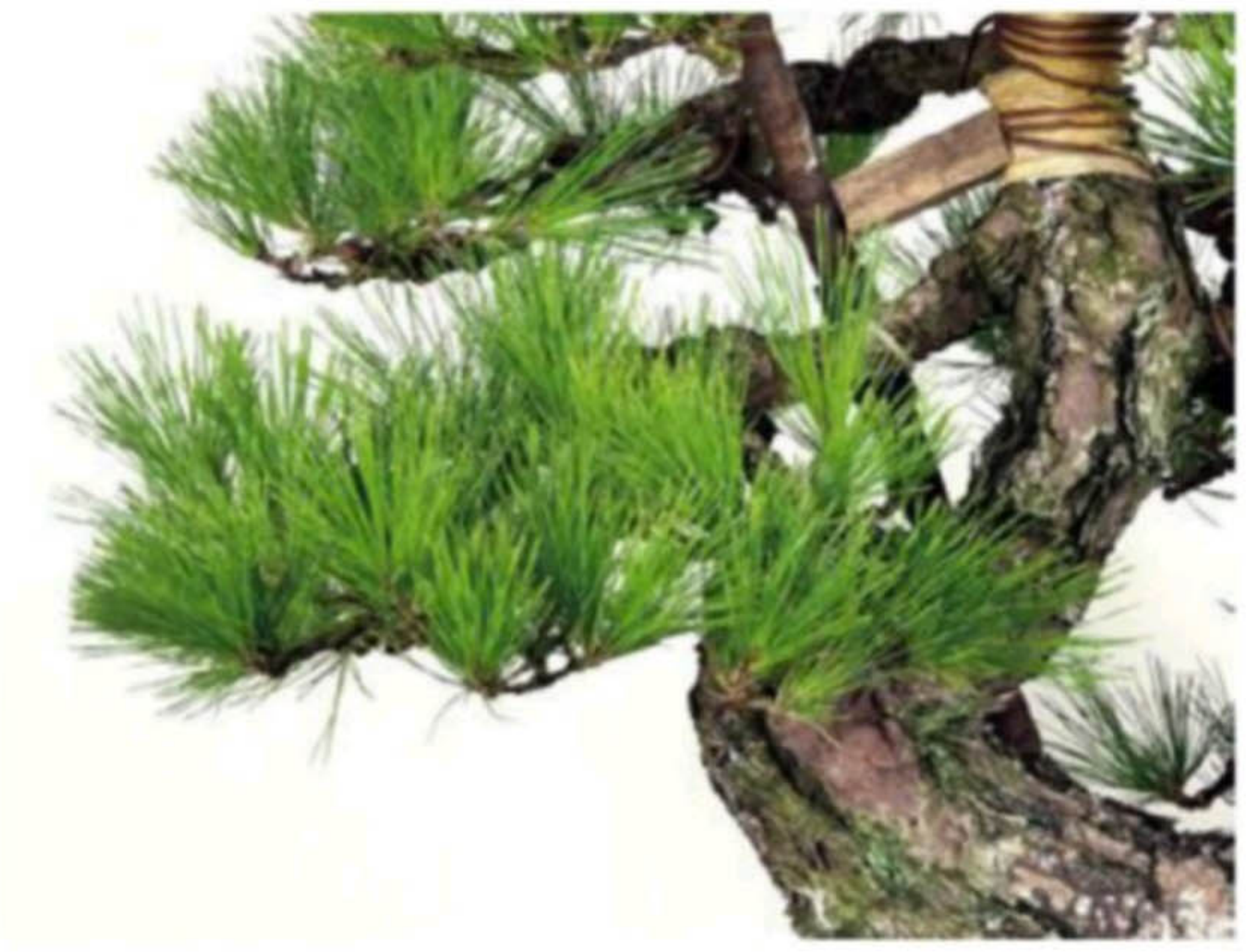

The apex after styling. The overall movement of the apex and branch is to the right

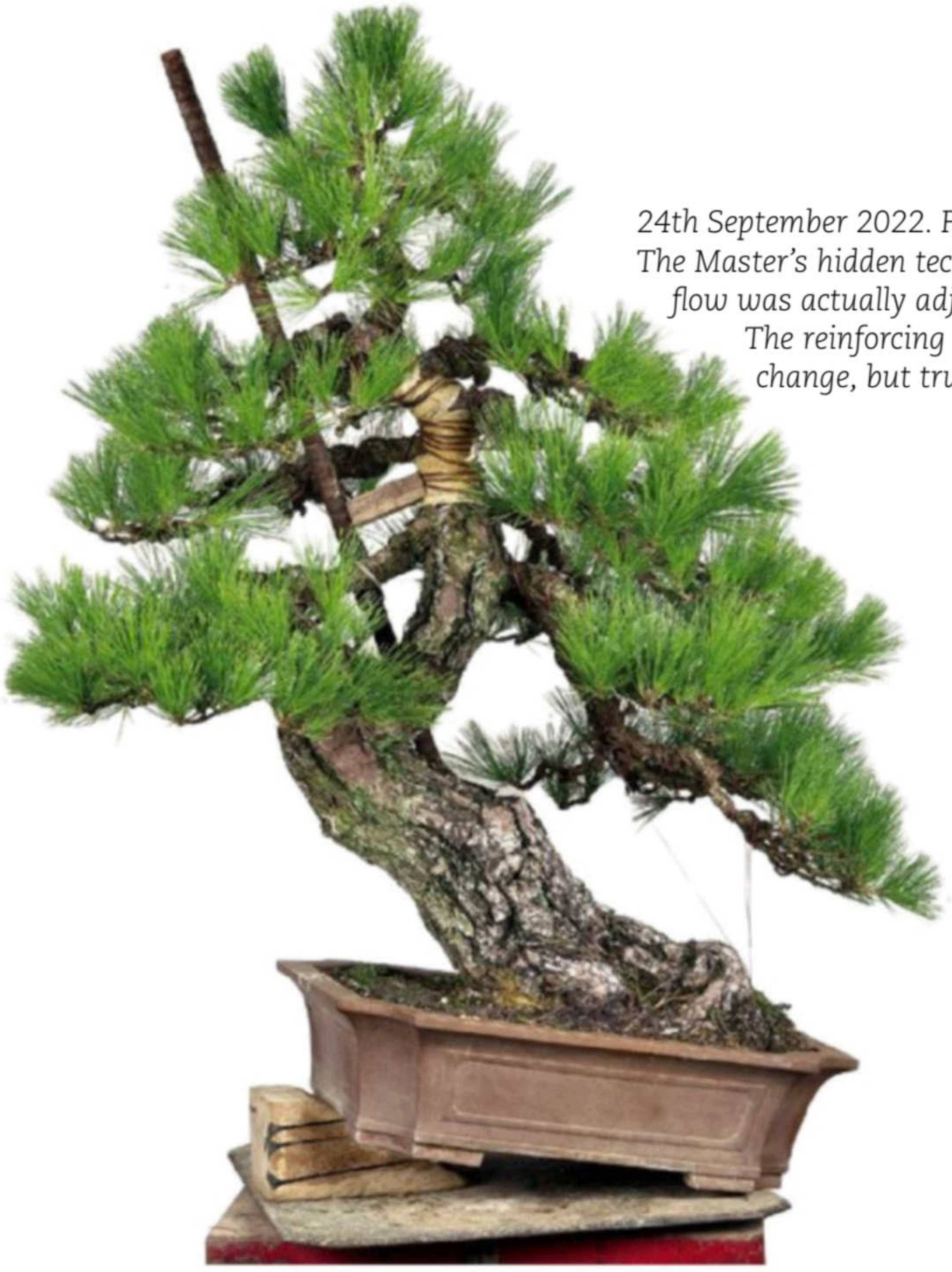

The lower left branch group. You can see how much the first left branch, a supporting and balancing branch, has been tightly pulled in

The results of skipping candle cutting (24th September 2022)

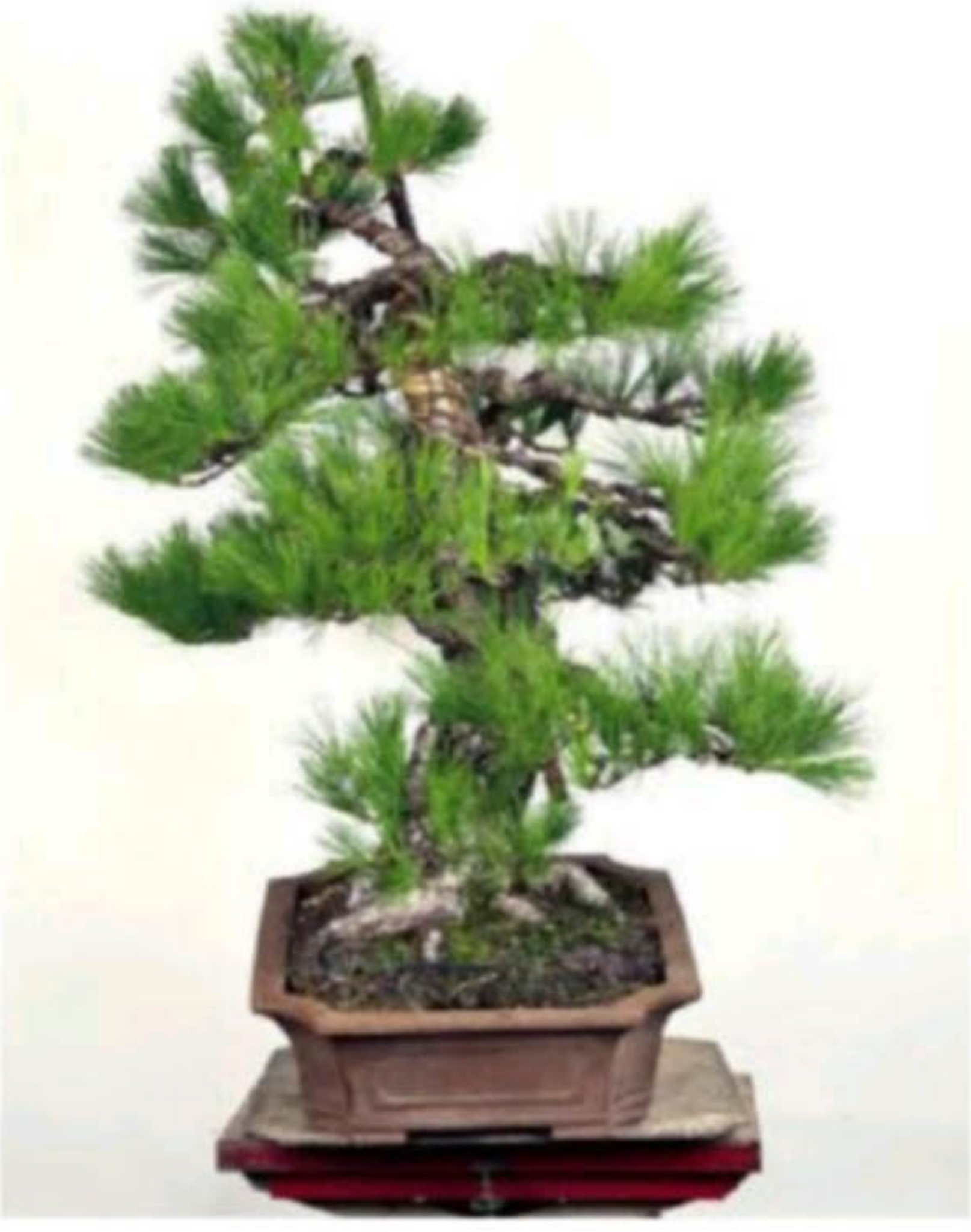

The lower right branch, as the key character branch, had developed well, showing healthy new bud growth


Despite the intense work on the upper section, there was no damage. The angle adjustment created a smooth rightward flow

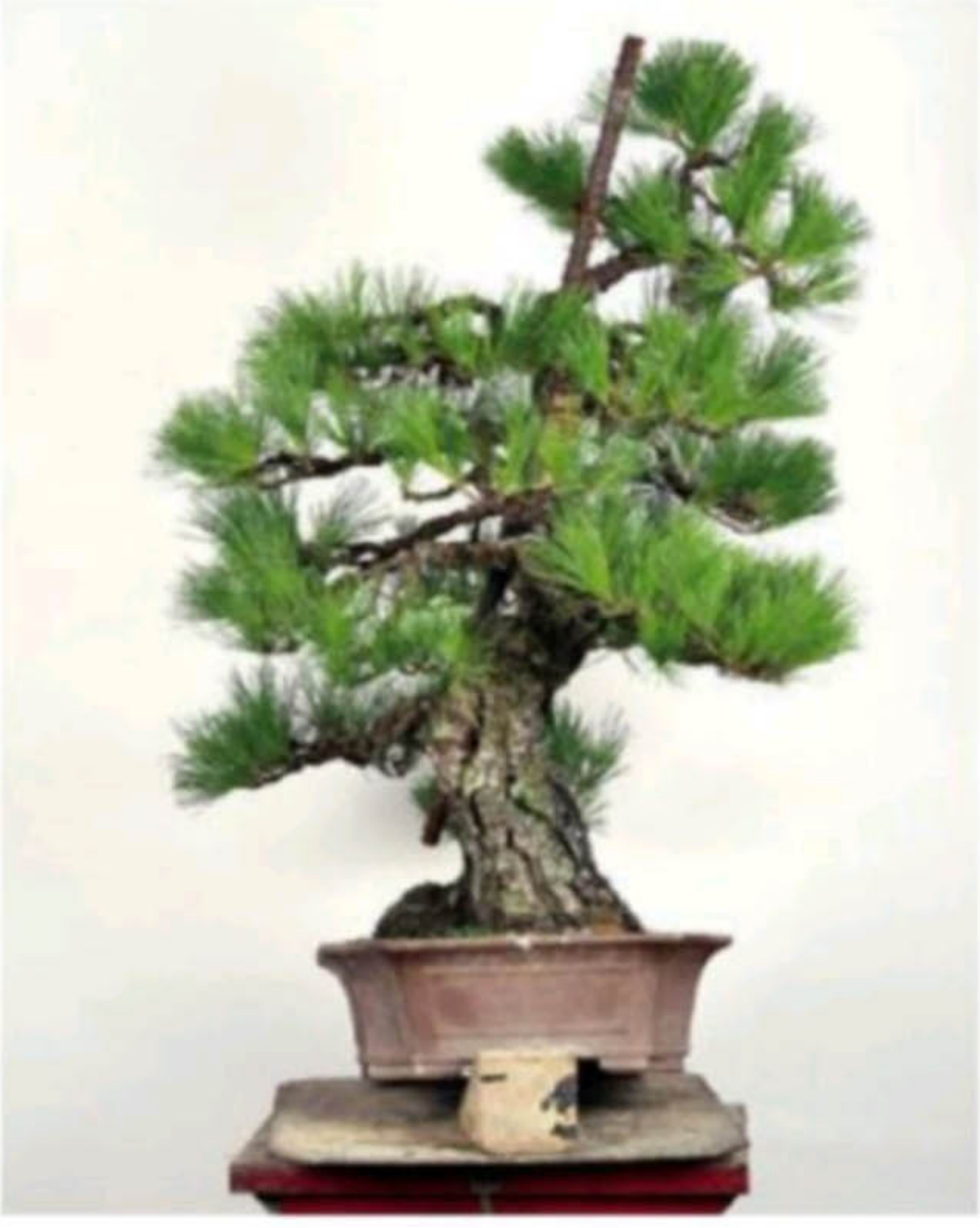

The first branch on the left, serving as a balancing and stopping branch, has its tip slightly raised and is tightened up


24th September 2022. Full view of the front. The Master's hidden technique for achieving rightward flow was actually adjusting the left side upwards. The reinforcing rod was removed after the angle change, but trunk bending continued

Right side view



Left side view



'Transformation does not have to be completed all in one go. That's something I understand well, coming from satsuki bonsai. Once the goal is clear, even if it takes years, you think about what's best for the tree. Taking time and moving towards the goal slowly — that's what true transformation is. It's about caring for the tree.'

As he resumed bending the upper section of the trunk, the Master gently guided Raphael with these words. This kind of special care isn't just for satsuki — it applies equally to all bonsai. It's that sense of compassion that helps a tree thrive and look its best.

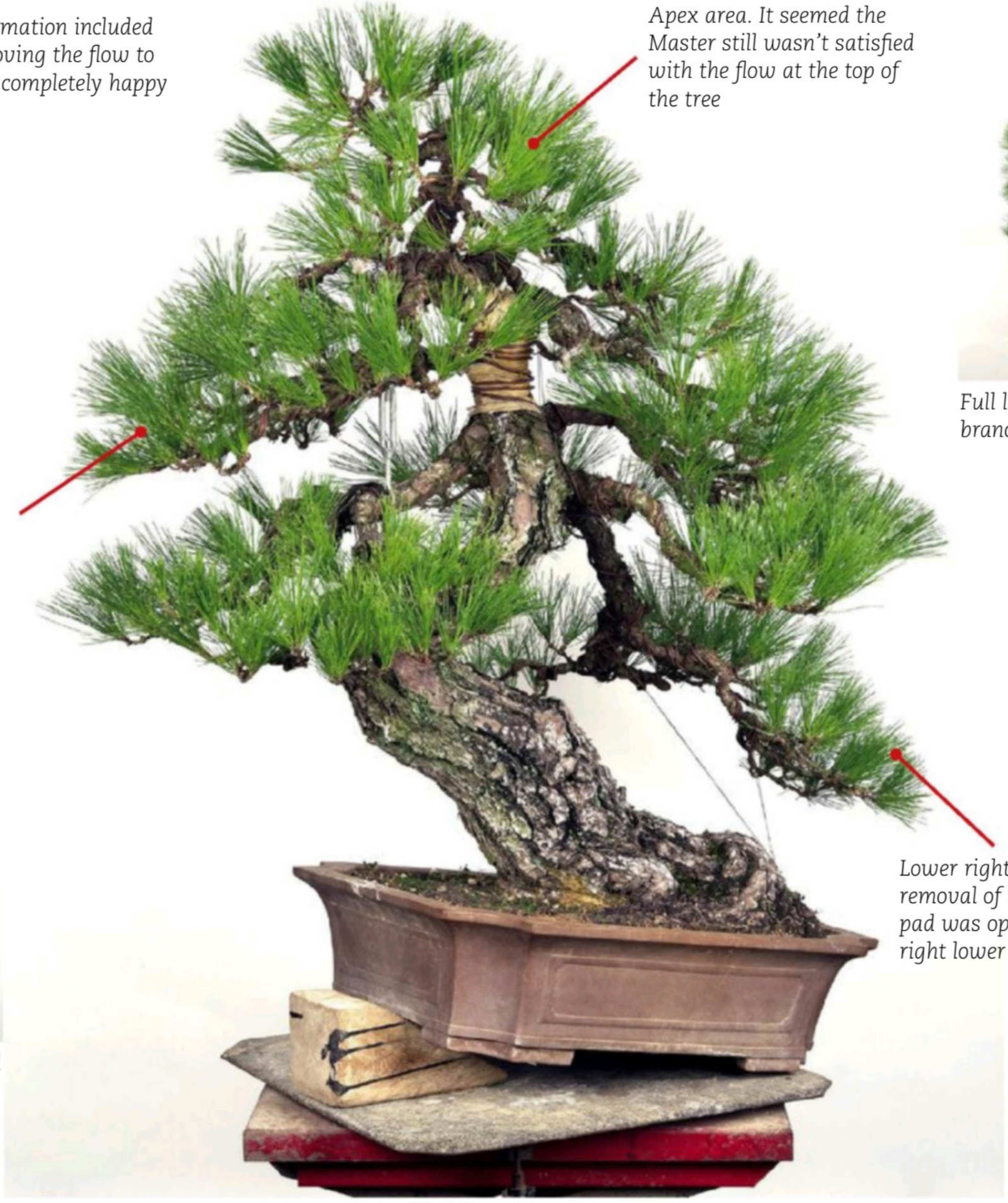
'The same goes for training apprentices,' the Master added with a smile.

> *There is no such thing as a final finish in bonsai*

'You're still bending it?' asked Raphael, the apprentice assisting that day, who thought the trunk bending had ended with the angle adjustment. He smiled slightly at the focused expression on the Master's face

Three parts after removing the iron bar (September 24, 2022)

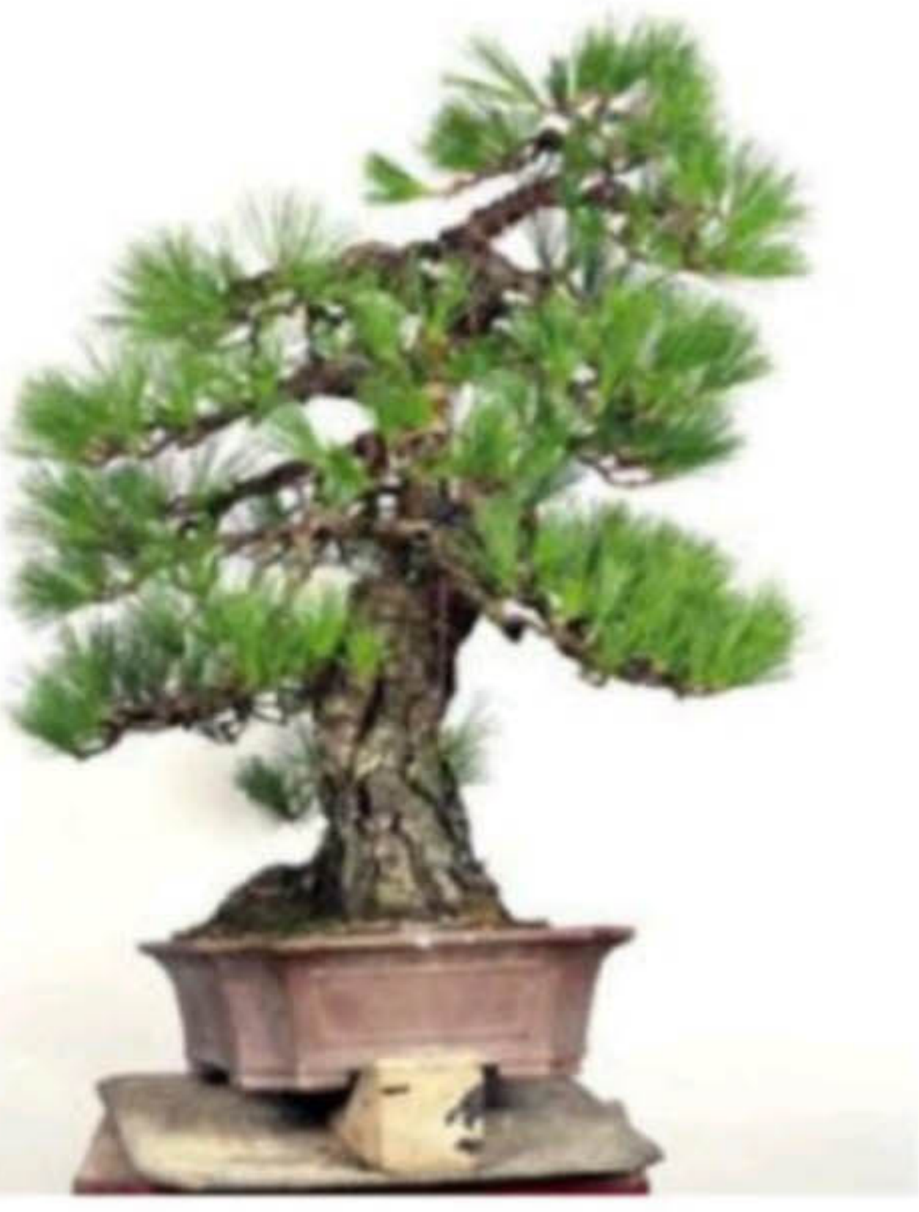
Same, full front view. The transformation included flipping the tree around and improving the flow to the right, the Master was still not completely happy



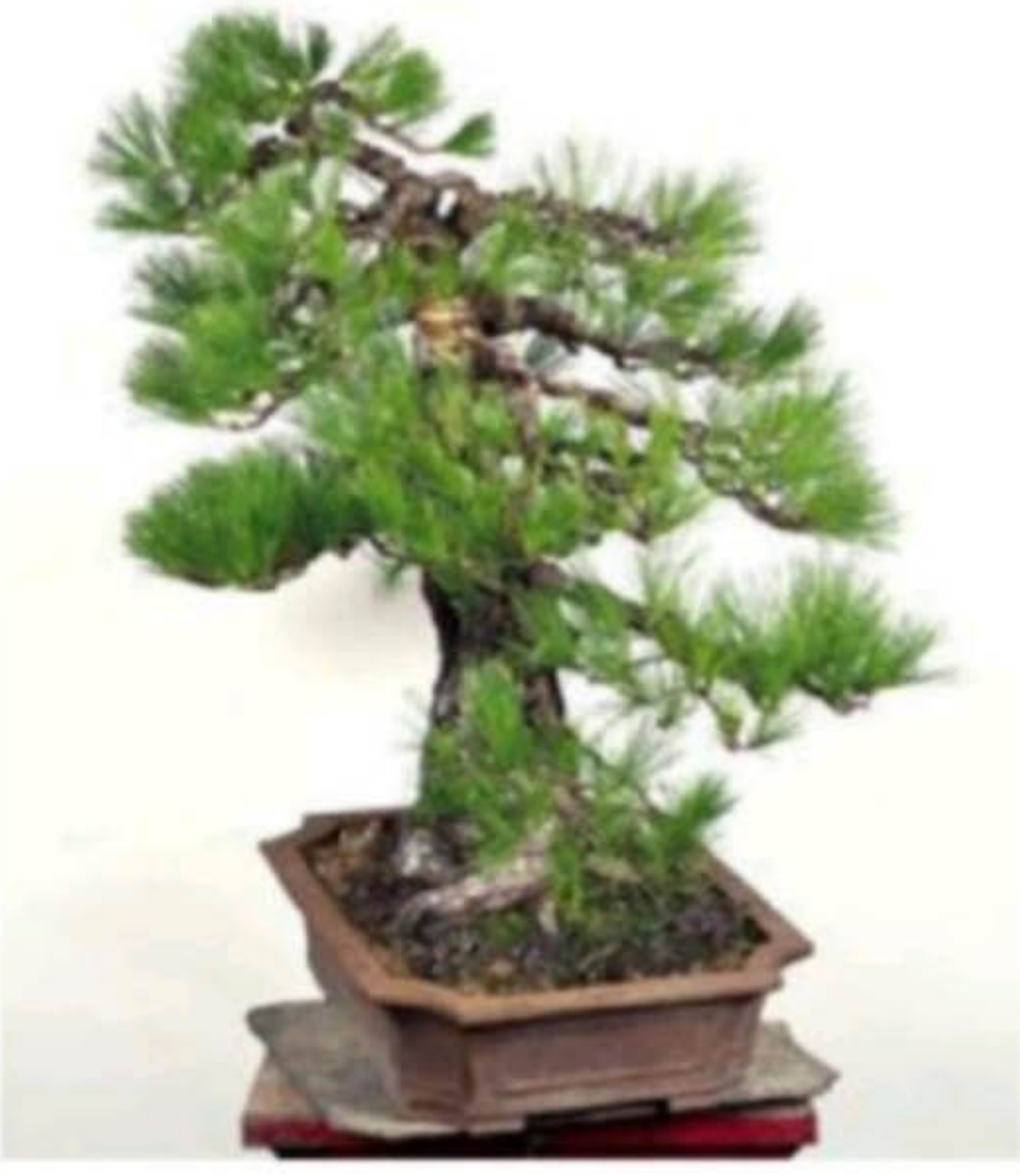
Apex area. It seemed the Master still wasn't satisfied with the flow at the top of the tree

Left branch group. The lower branch, as a receiving branch, had been tightened up quite well

Lower right branch area after the removal of the iron bar. The foliage pad was opened up, emphasizing the right lower branch



Full left-side view. The back branch was well tucked in



Full right-side view after removal of the iron bar. The forward movement of the apex isn't bad

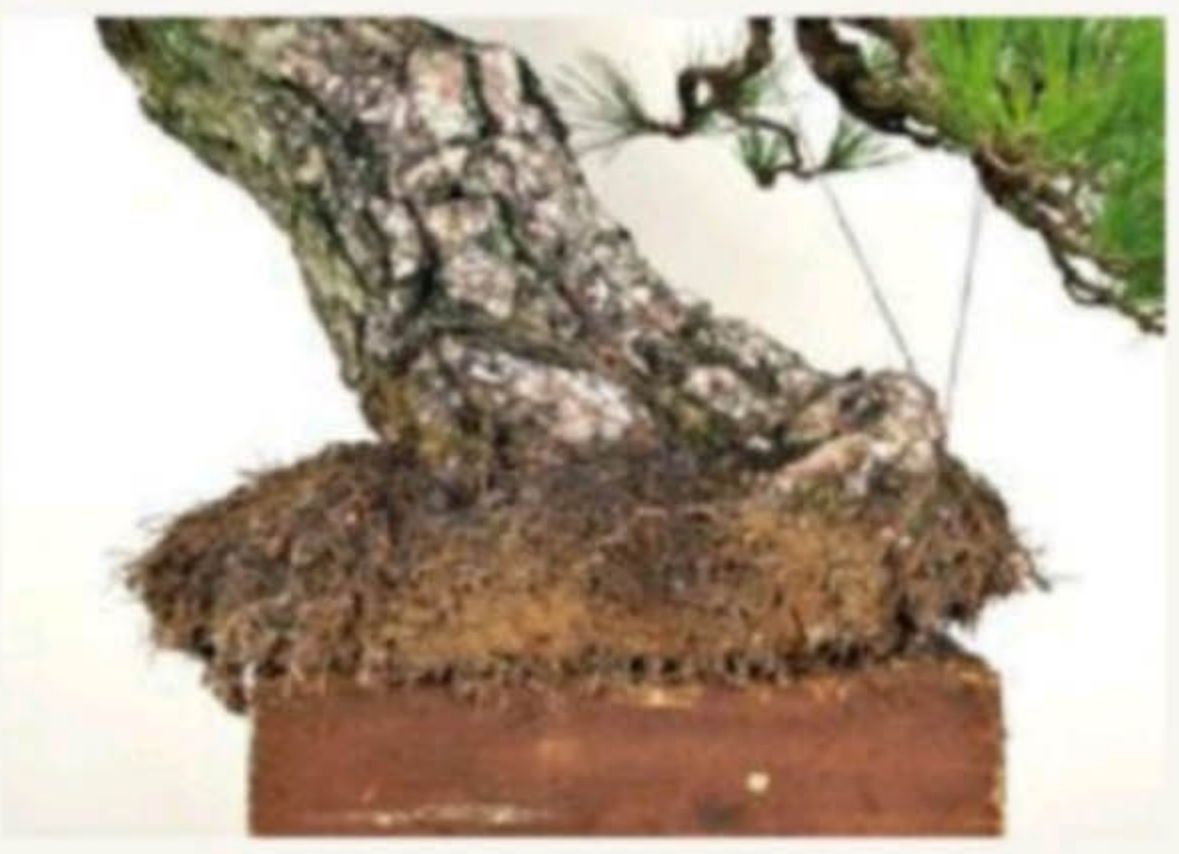
Repotting for the first time in two years

Two years after the last repotting. It took three people to remove the tree from the pot

The roots and root soil were in good condition. Root work for the angle change seems not to be an issue

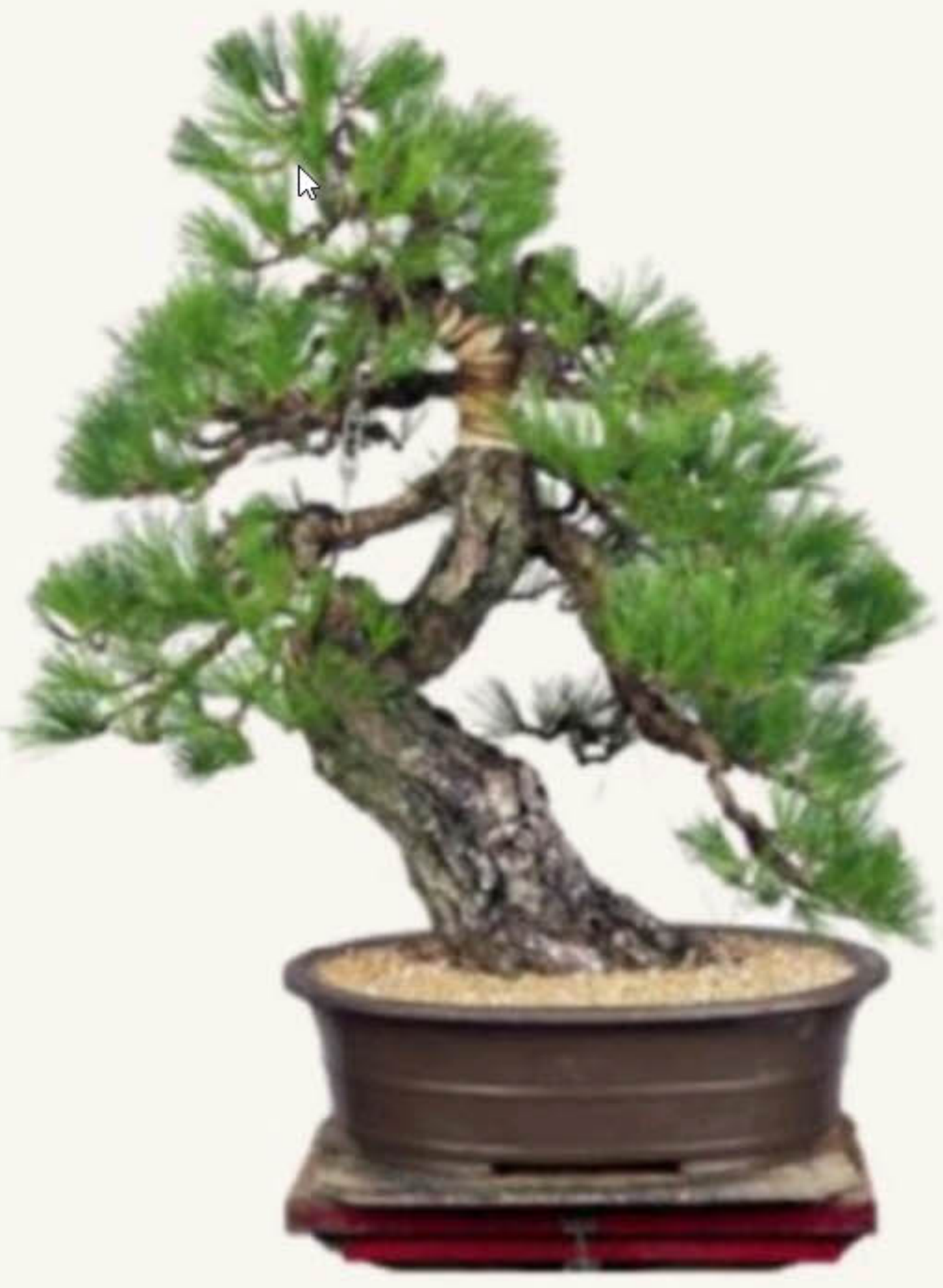
'Raphael, you can leave the upper right root somewhat intact, the key is breaking down the raised left upper root,' said the Master, as he worked on that area himself

Next, the Master broke down and cut back the lower right root, which needed to be lowered


Front view after root work. 'We could have trimmed the lower right root a little more, but above all, the tree's safety comes first,' said the Master, and stopped there

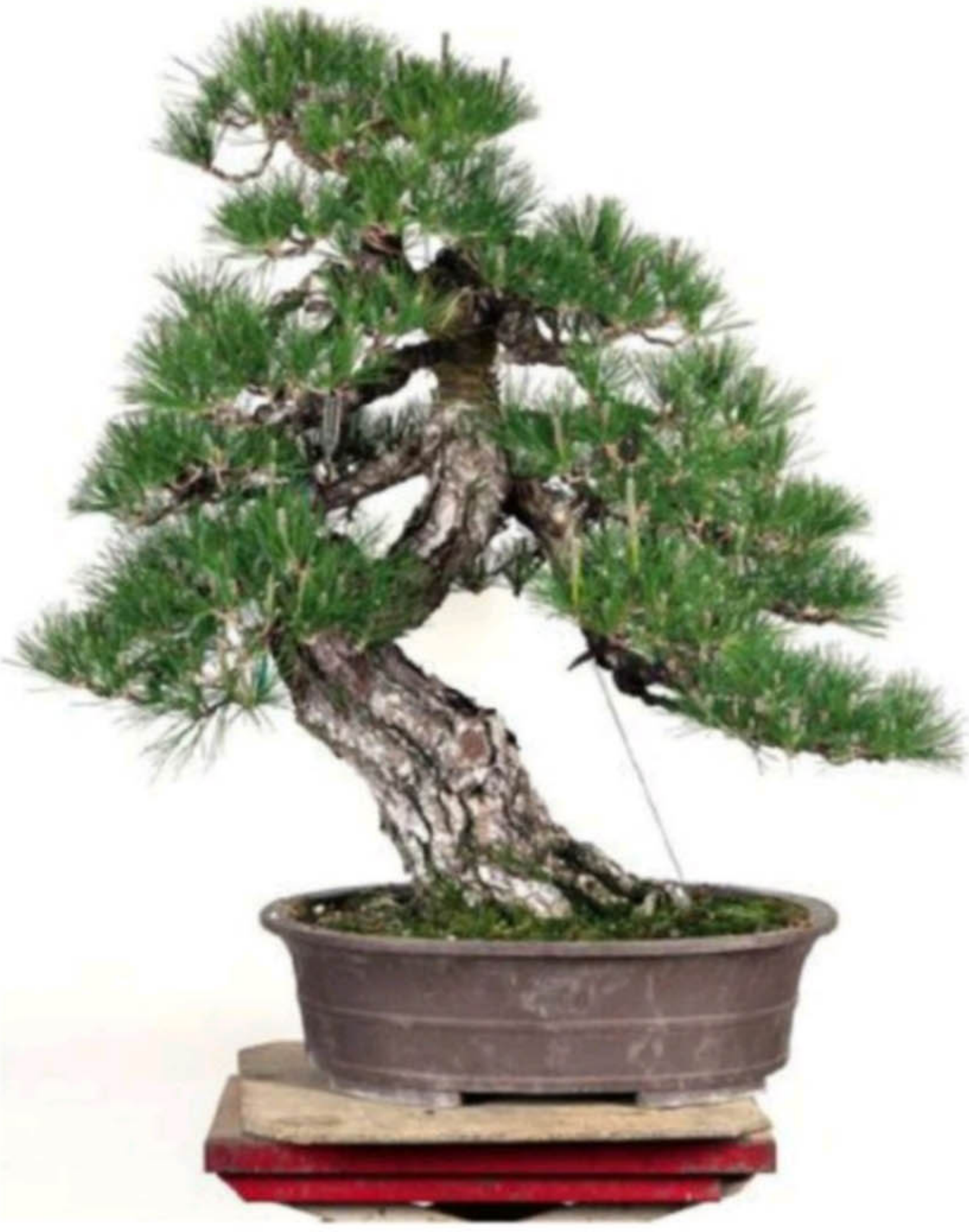
Thinking of the tree's stress, the Master prepared a slightly deeper pot to plant it in

Charcoal, coarse soil, and some symbiotic mycorrhizae were placed at the bottom of the pot and the tree was tied in. Soil was added and packed in


Full front view after repotting. 'The pot is a bit deep, but this one should be fine for now.' Here, too, the Master's care for the tree was evident

April 25, 2024
Two years after the previous transformation

Thanks to not candle cutting and the choice of pot, steady growth and budding were observed

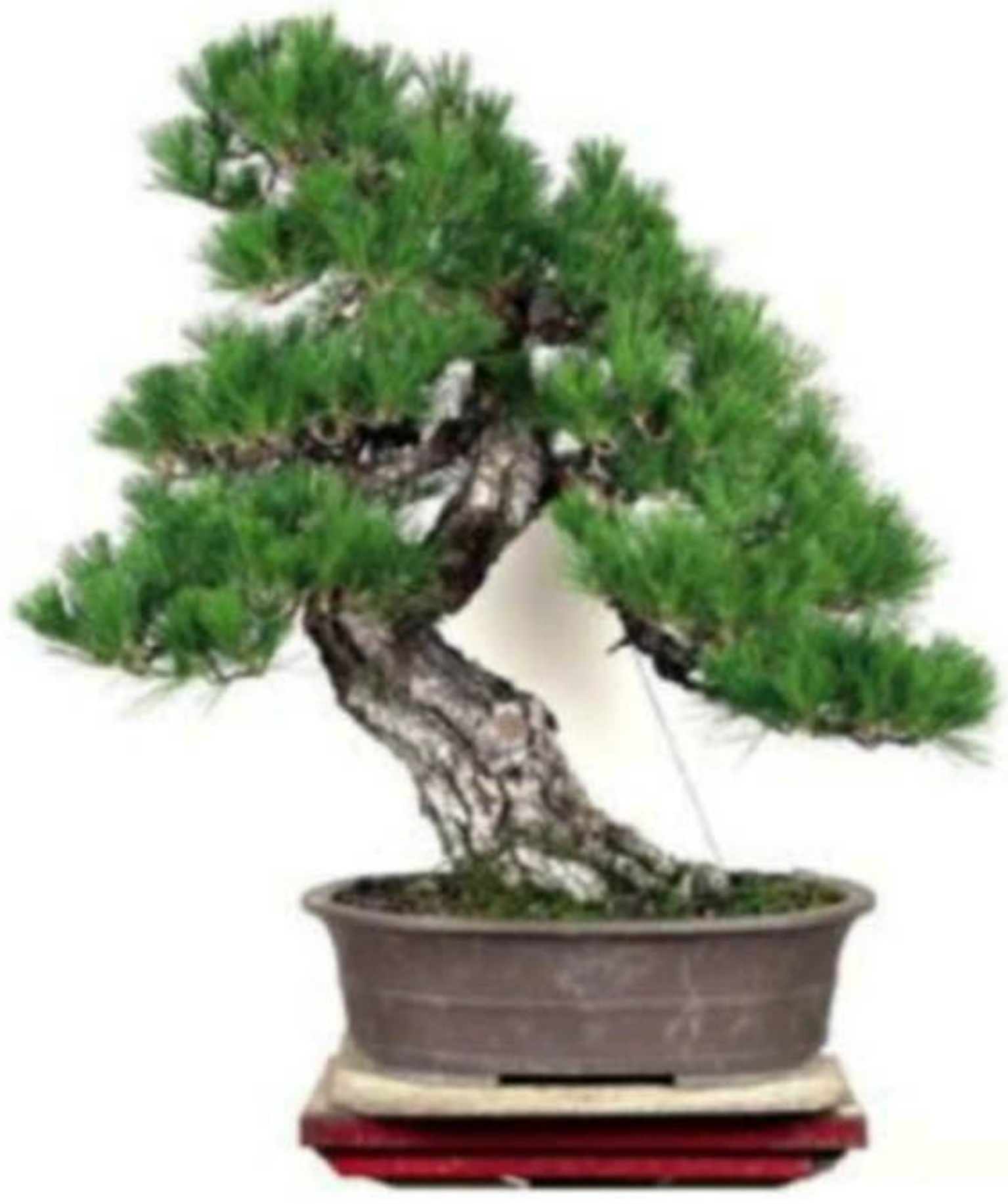


There were no issues with the top of the tree, where the core was removed and the trunk bent upwards

After compacting the apex. Although the trunk line was intended to be raised to the right, the Master first started by pressing down to the left

After checking the strength of the tree, the Master again began to compact the apex down to the left with a steel rod. Mr Fukudate, who graduated from an apprenticeship at Shunkaen, joined the work

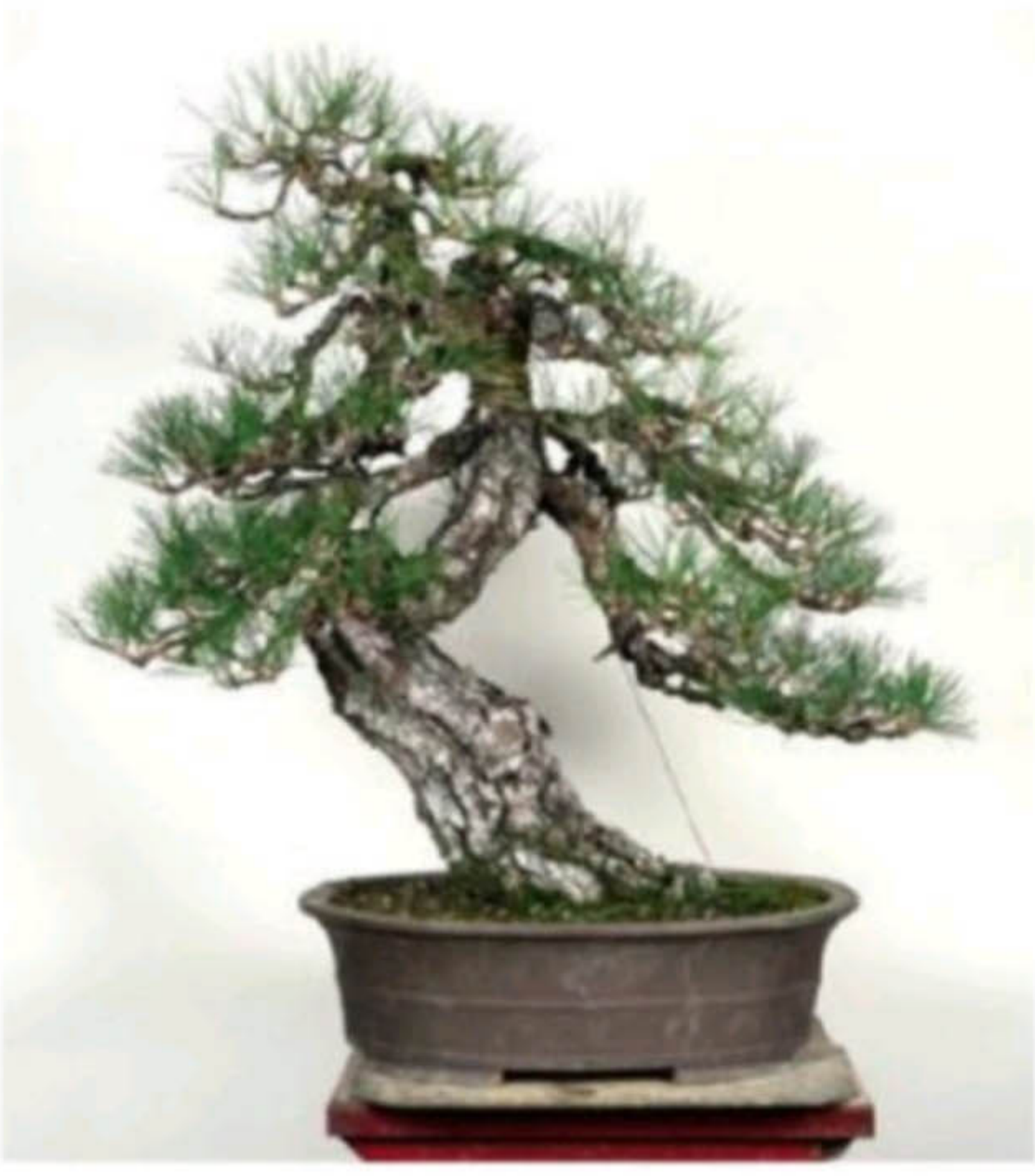
20th June 2024
Candle cutting after two years



The long awaited candle cutting is ready to be performed. The growth is even and strong

There is no difference in the strength of the apex, which has undergone so much strong work

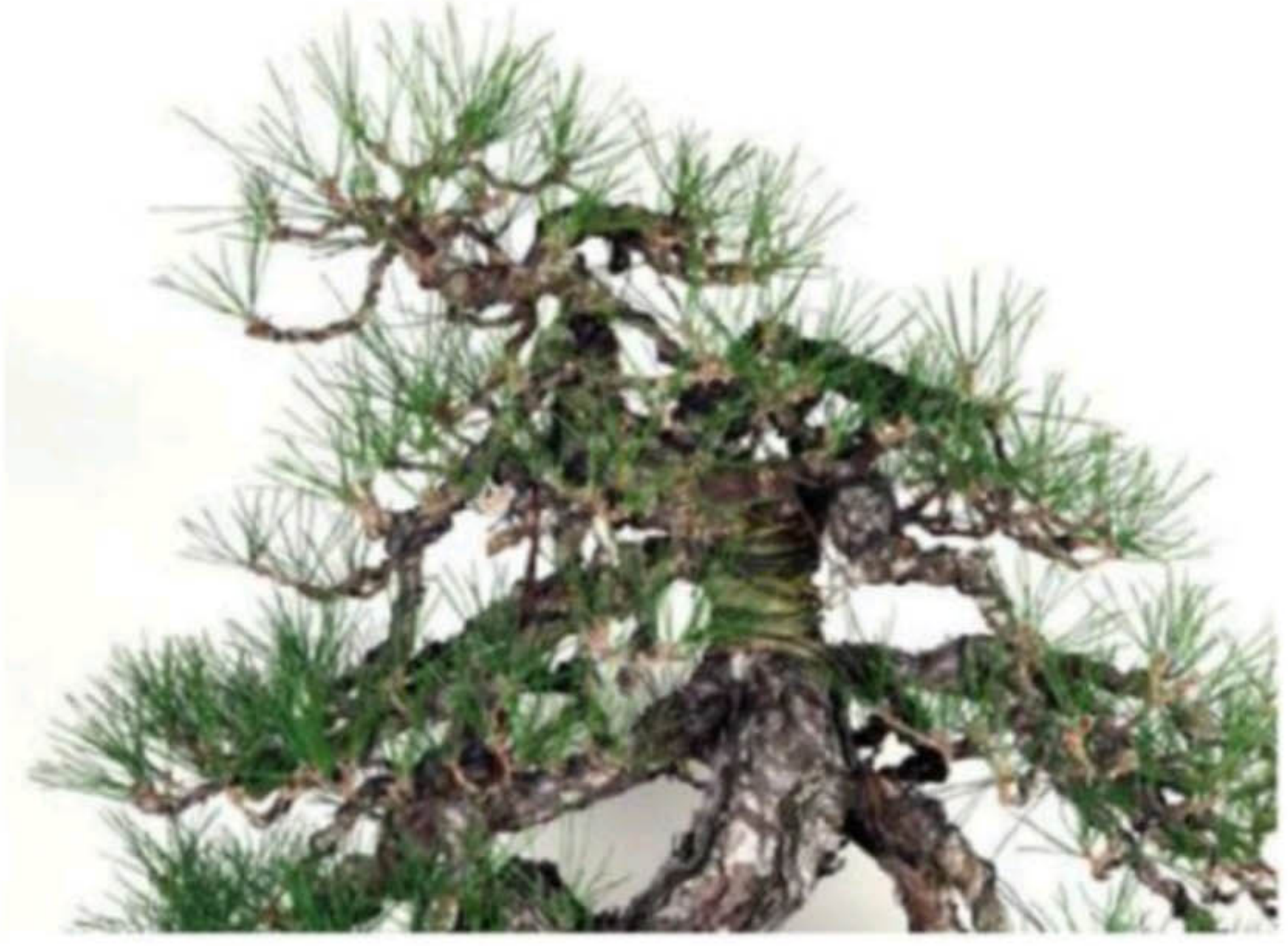
The Master said that recently, unless something extraordinary happens, he performs candle cutting in one go rather than separating the strong and weak candles



Front view after candle cutting. Needle reduction has also been performed where necessary

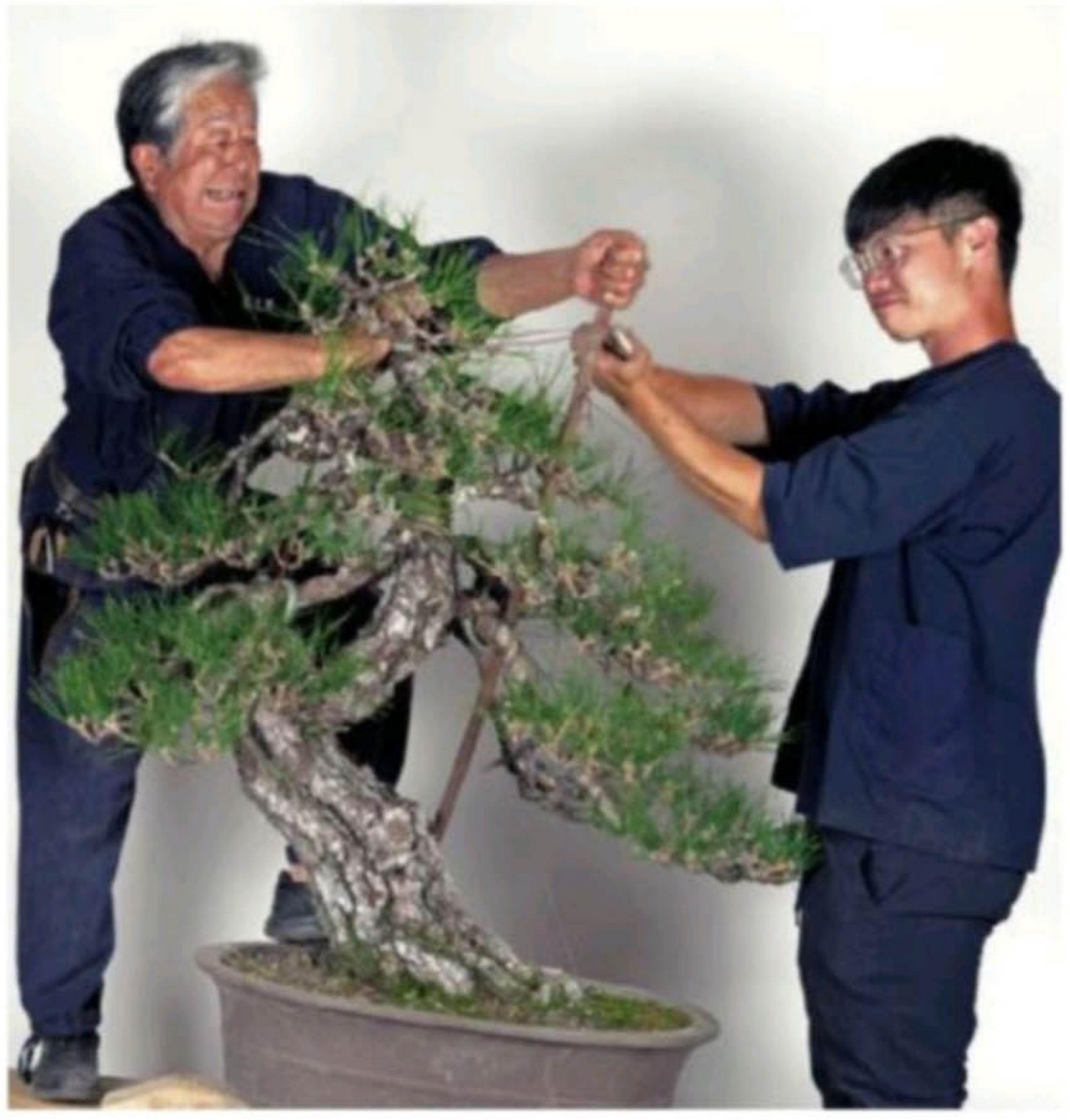
Trunk bending after candle cutting

It's clear the apex was compacted to the left. Trunk bending to match the rightward flow is now necessary.

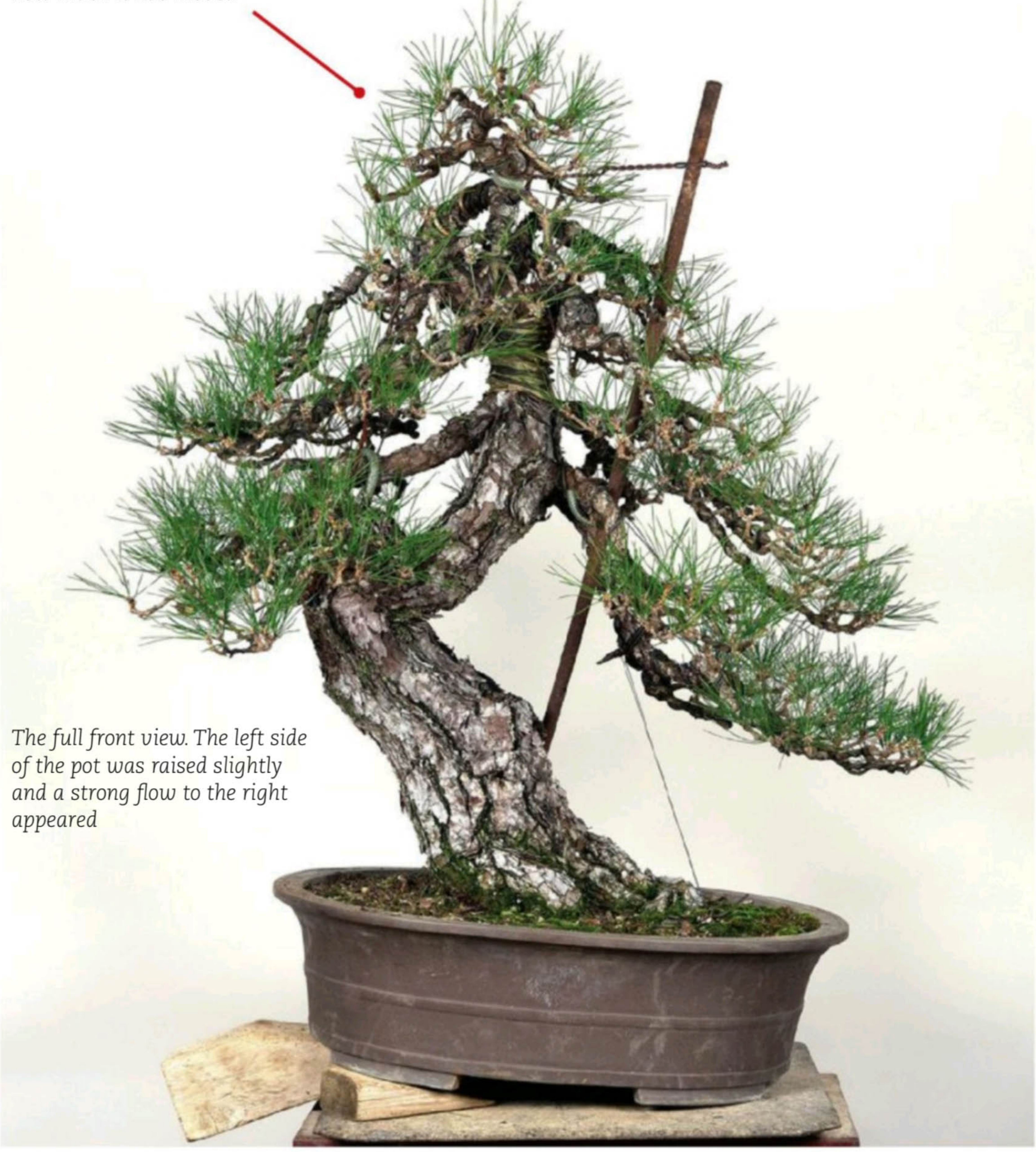


This was the result of the previous trunk bending, the trunk line had bent strongly to the left

This time the iron bar was fixed to the right. The Master put all his strength into bending the trunk to the right, while Wu-kun tightened the wire on the iron bar

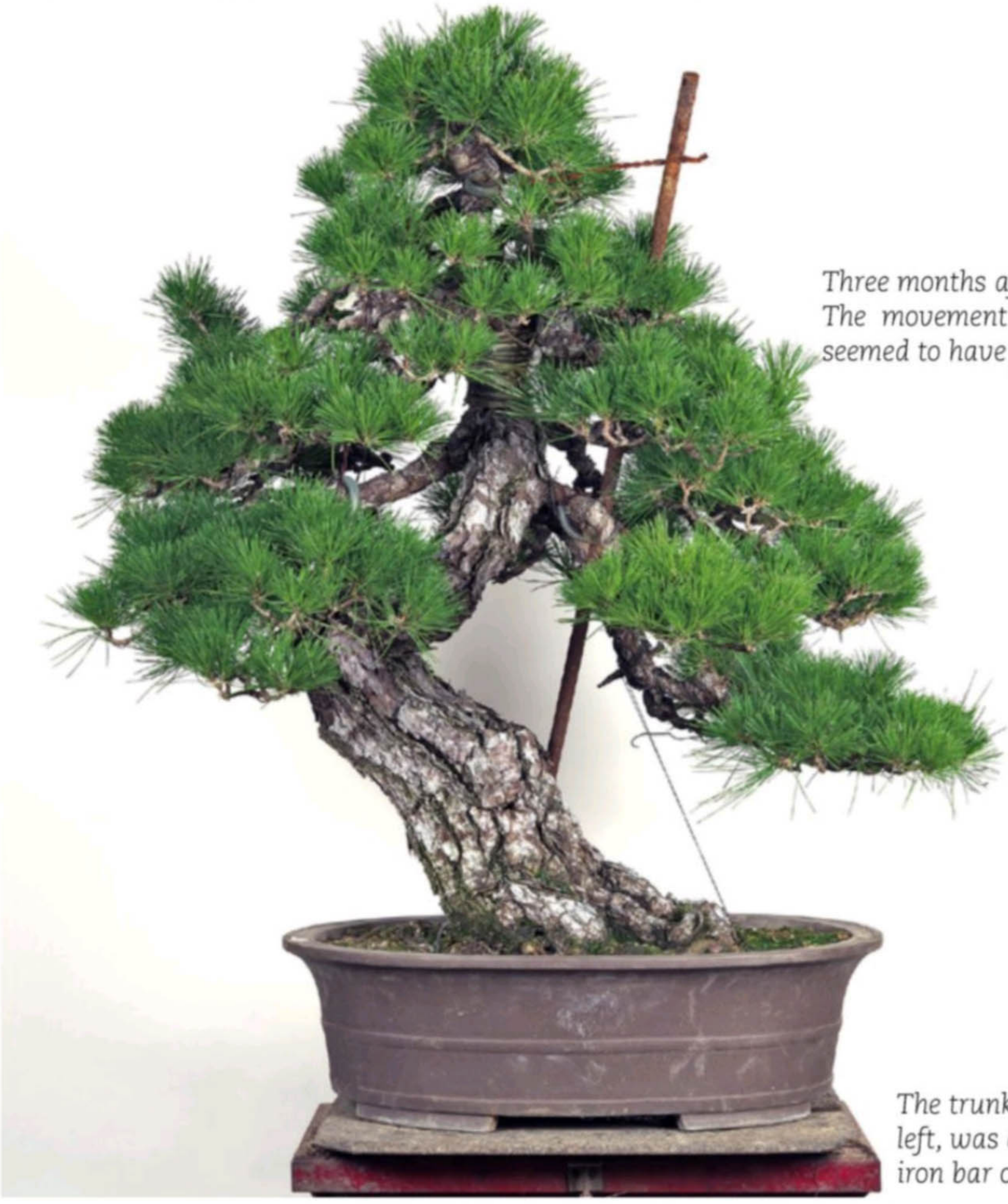


After moving the trunk line, you can see just how much it has moved



The full front view. The left side of the pot was raised slightly and a strong flow to the right appeared

September 28, 2024
Needle reduction and iron bar removal



Three months after the last trunk bending. The movement of the raised trunk line seemed to have fully set

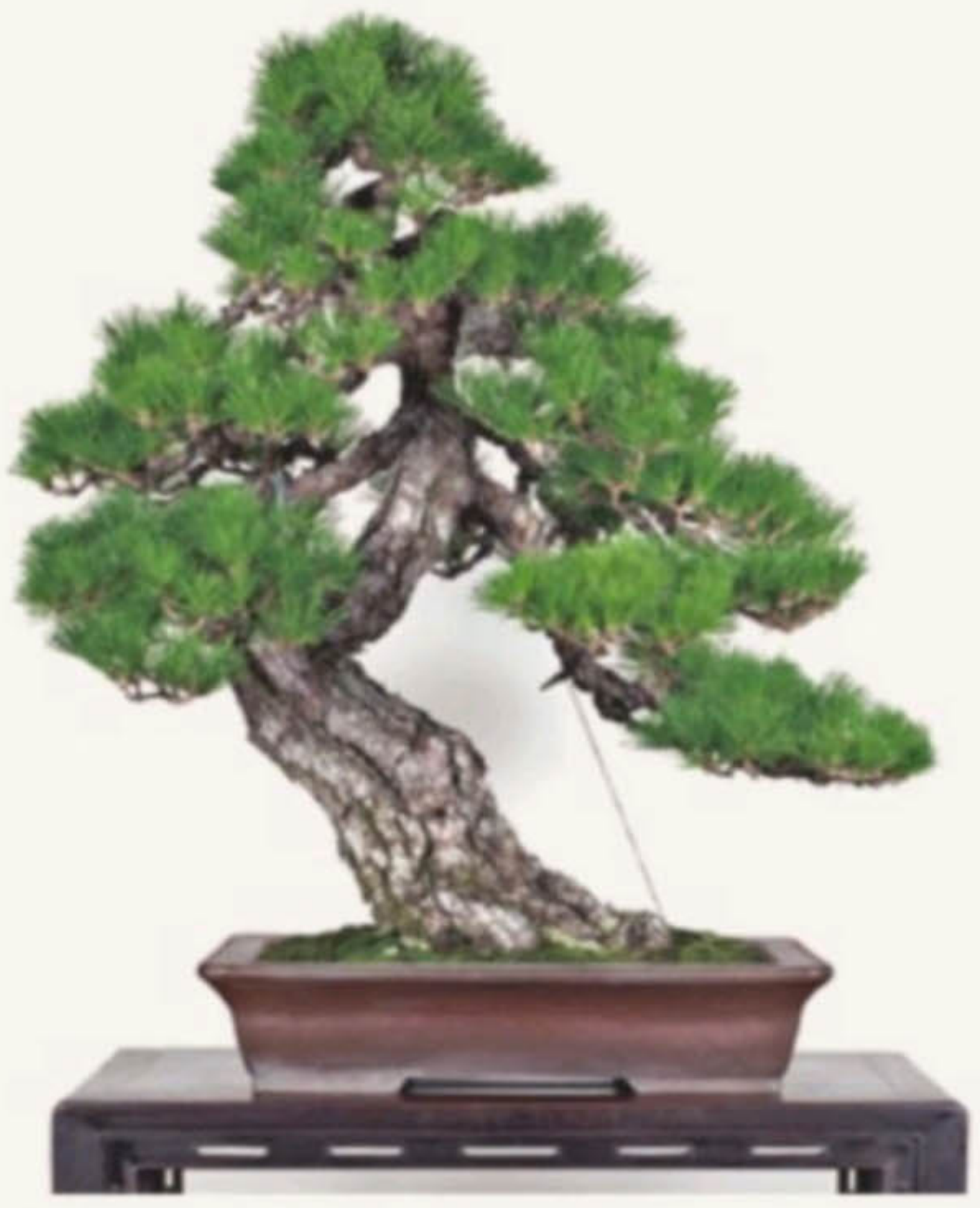
The trunk line, which had flowed left, was drawn back towards the iron bar on the right-hand side

The Master checked the tension of the pulling wire while reducing needles where appropriate

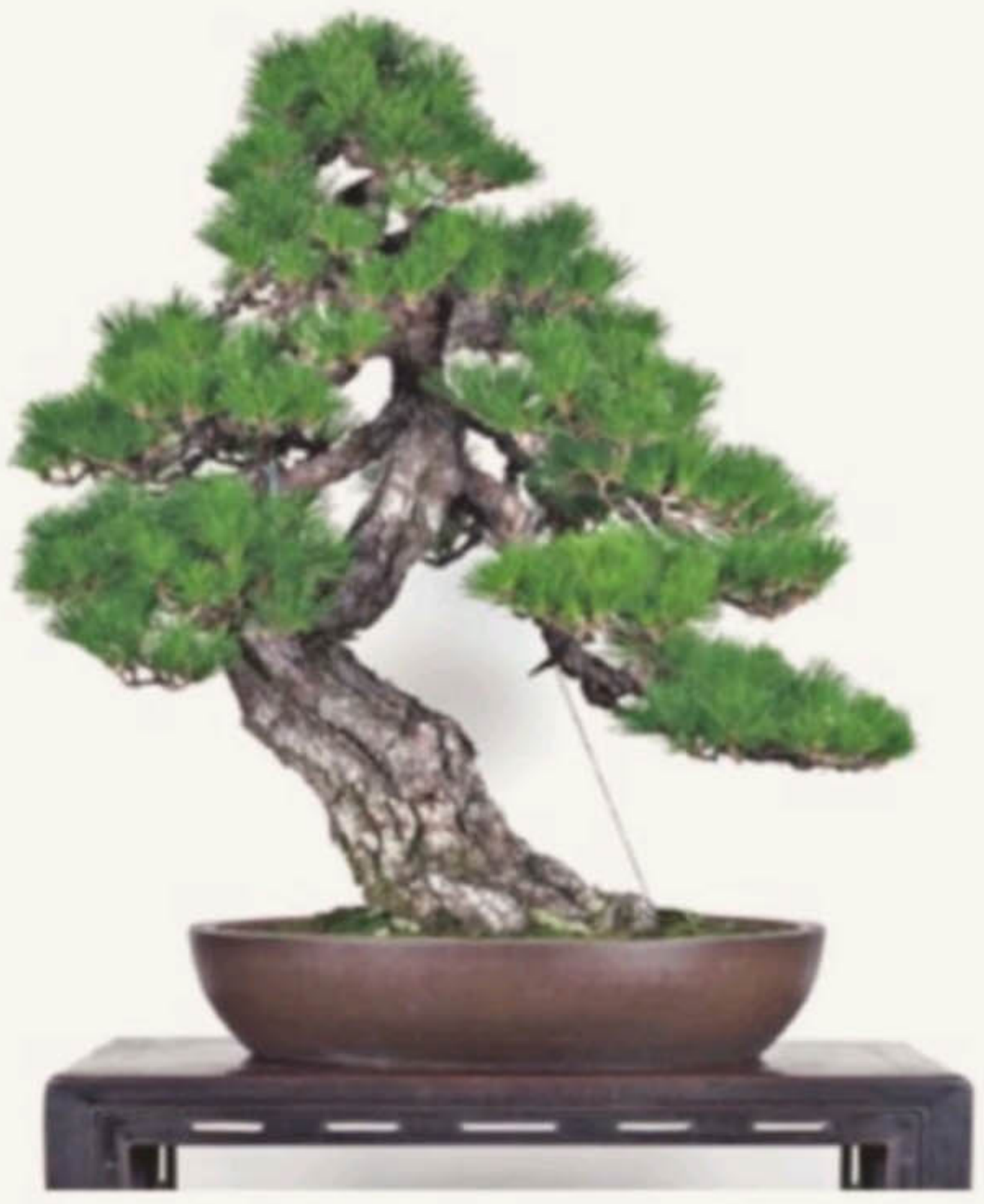
Afterwards, the Master removed the iron bar from the tree, saying the final shaping of small branches would complete the work.

> *The essential beauty of bonsai lies in the dignity of life and the beauty of harmony*

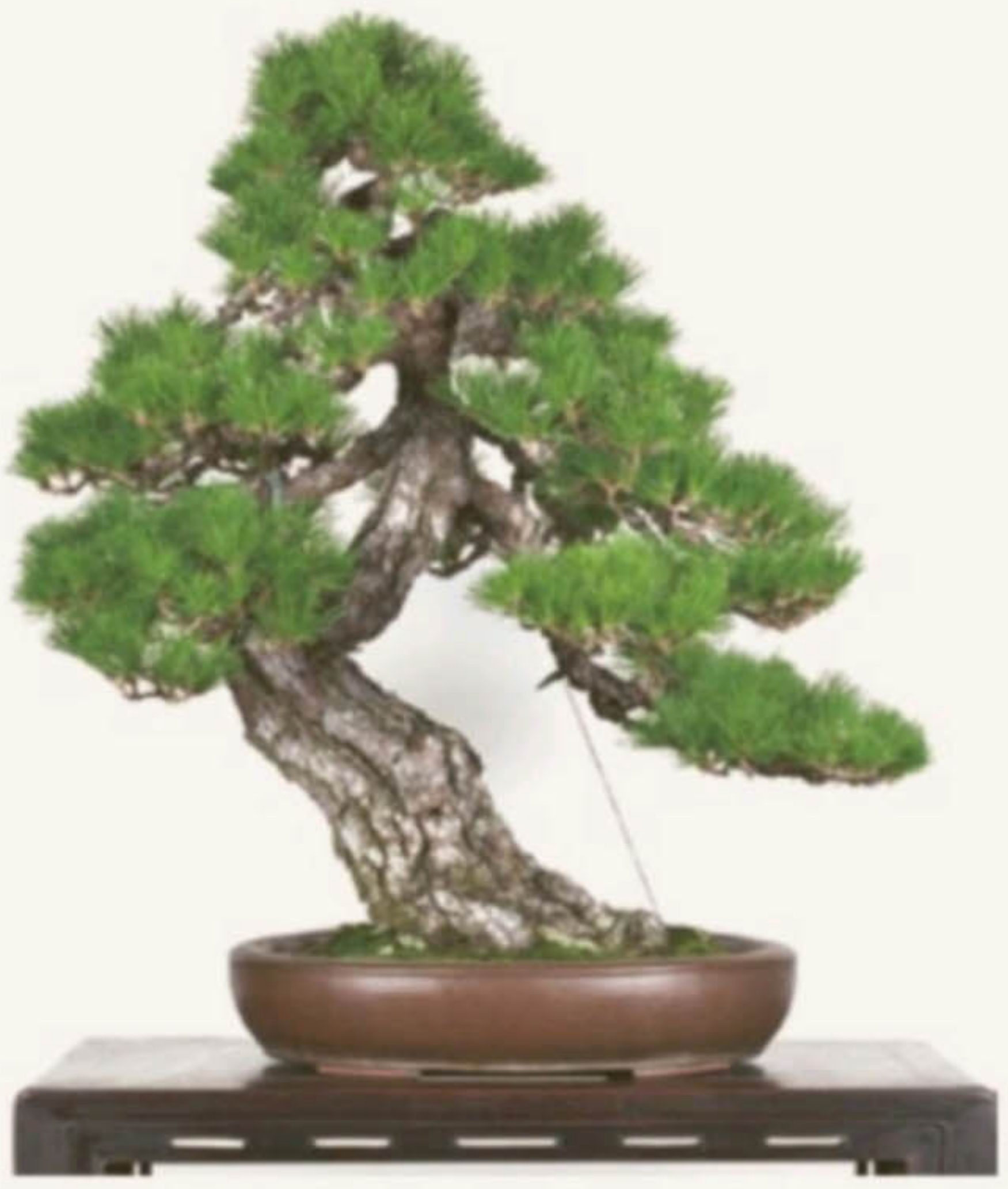
Pot selection considerations (all photoshopped)



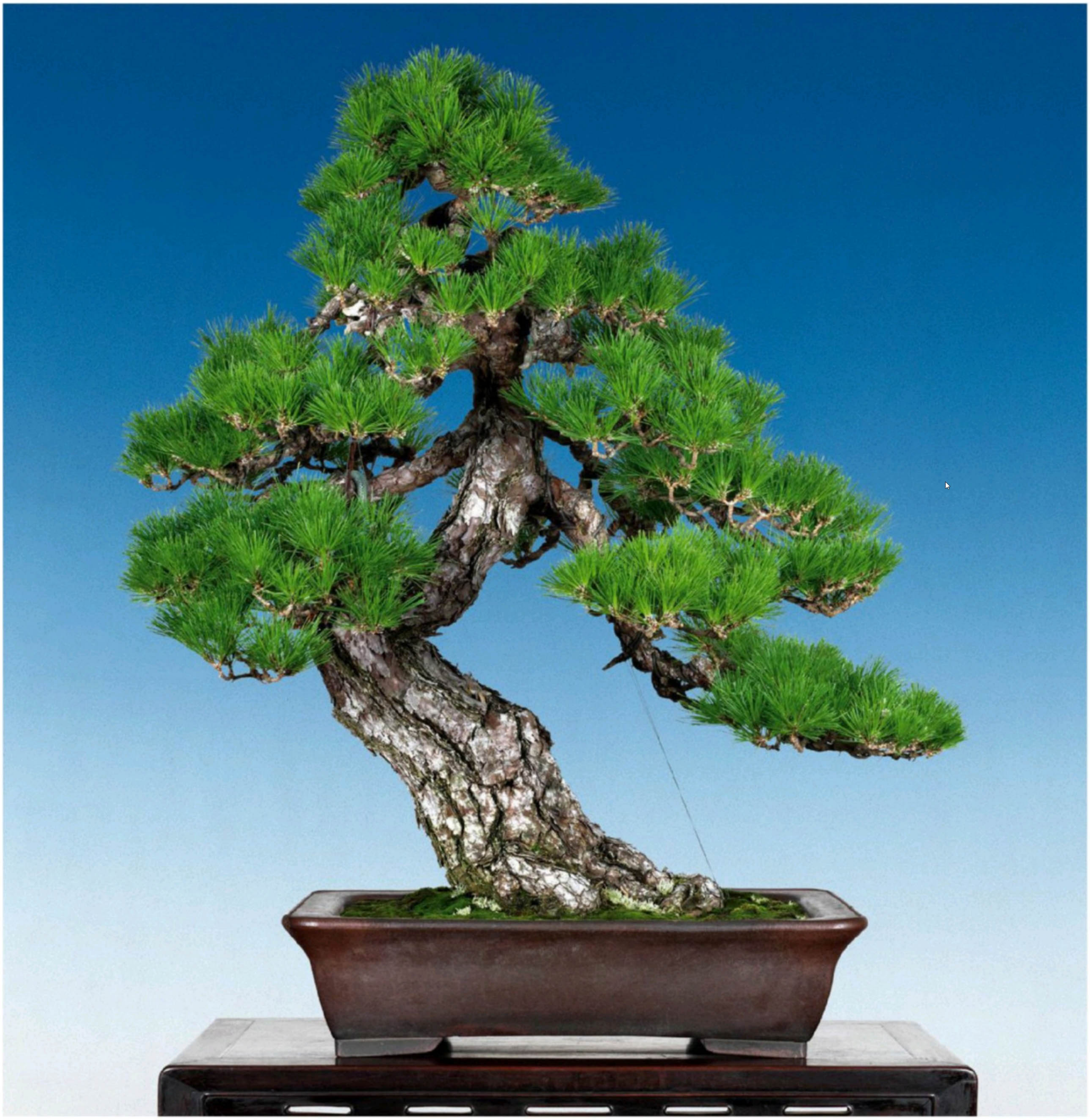
This is a slightly shallower, externally rimmed, rectangular, purple clay pot. It appears a little lighter, but is still a decent match



A clean, rimless, oval, purple clay pot. It feels slightly oversized for the tree and gives a plain, stretched-out impression



The third option is an oval, purple clay pot with a decorative edge and a lower band. This one is slightly too small and becomes visually overpowered by the thickness of the trunk



Height: 106 cm. Width: 95 cm (Pot is photoshopped)

This is the tentatively final form

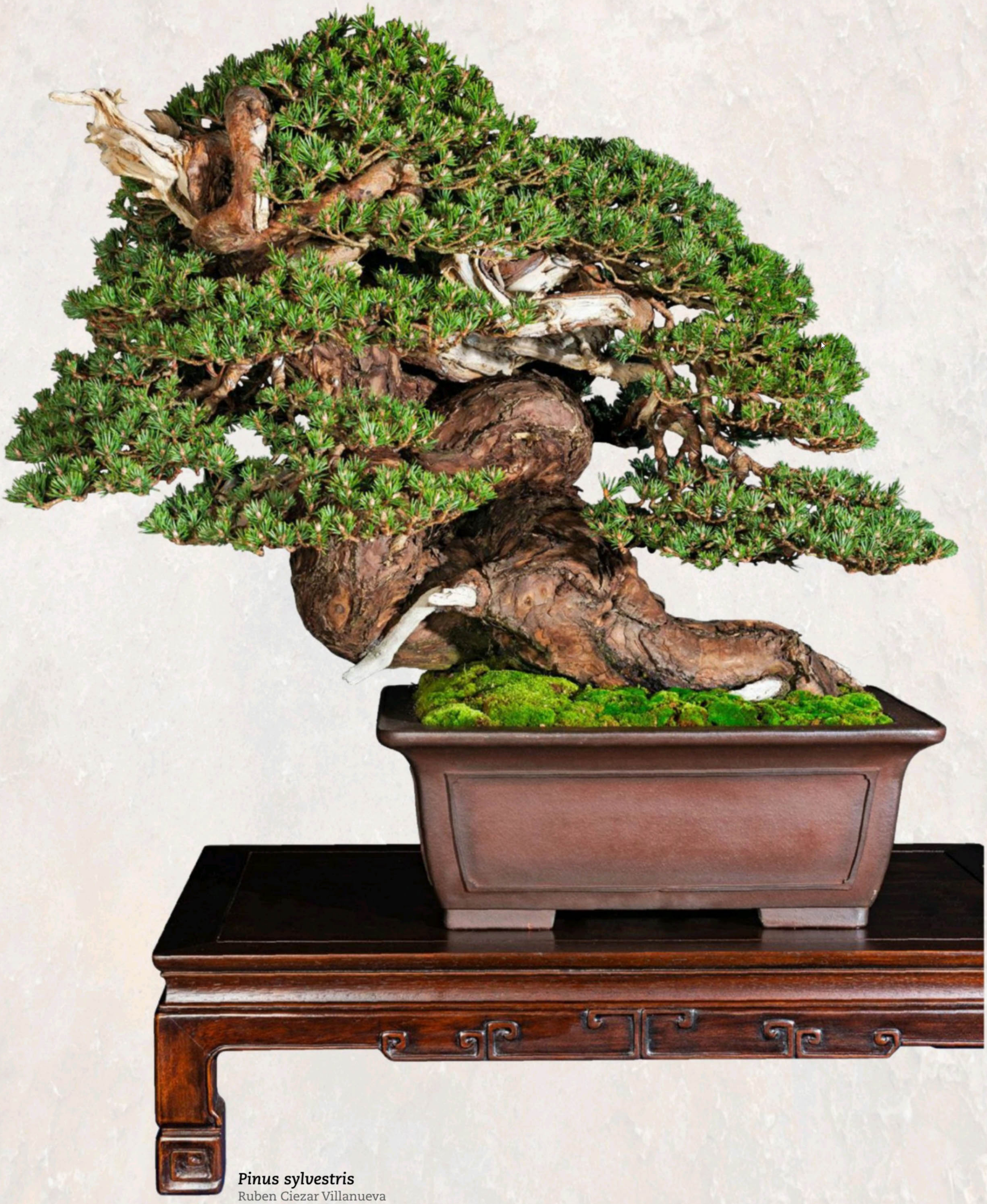
Even though it is a transformation, there's no need to rush the finishing touches. The Master gave this advice to Mr Rafael after removing the iron bar: 'If the trunk shifts back, or you want to bend it a little more, you can reinsert the iron bar and bend it. Or think of another way to move it to the desired position. That's the wisdom of human beings. If you rush and break the trunk or damage the branches, then it's all for nothing.'

Dignity of life, the beauty of harmony

After finishing the work, the Master spoke about the future outlook, having fully grasped the essence of this tree.

'The essential beauty of bonsai lies in the dignity of life and the beauty of harmony. The charm of this black pine is in the powerful, exposed roots and spacious elegance of the lateral branches. The awkward bump in the middle can be covered with the first branch on the left. From here on, time will elevate the tree's character.'

Capturing the tree's charm, enhancing it with a long-term perspective, this is the continually changing world of Kunio Kobayashi.



Pinus sylvestris
Ruben Ciezar Villanueva

Photos:Bonsai Focus Studio

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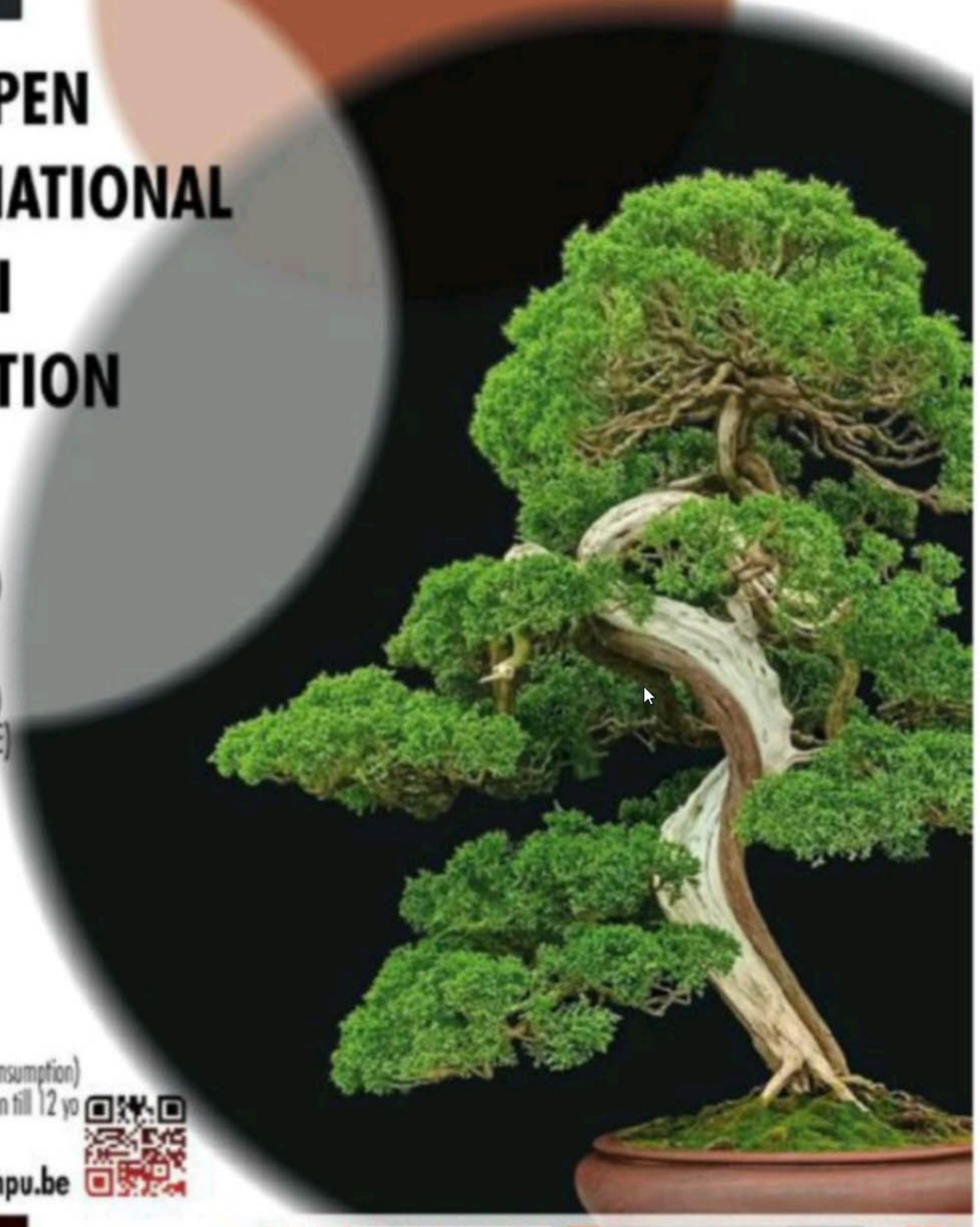

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Neither one, nor the other

Koji Matsusue works on a 'Yatsubusa' hinoki cypress

Text and photography: Kinbon, Japan

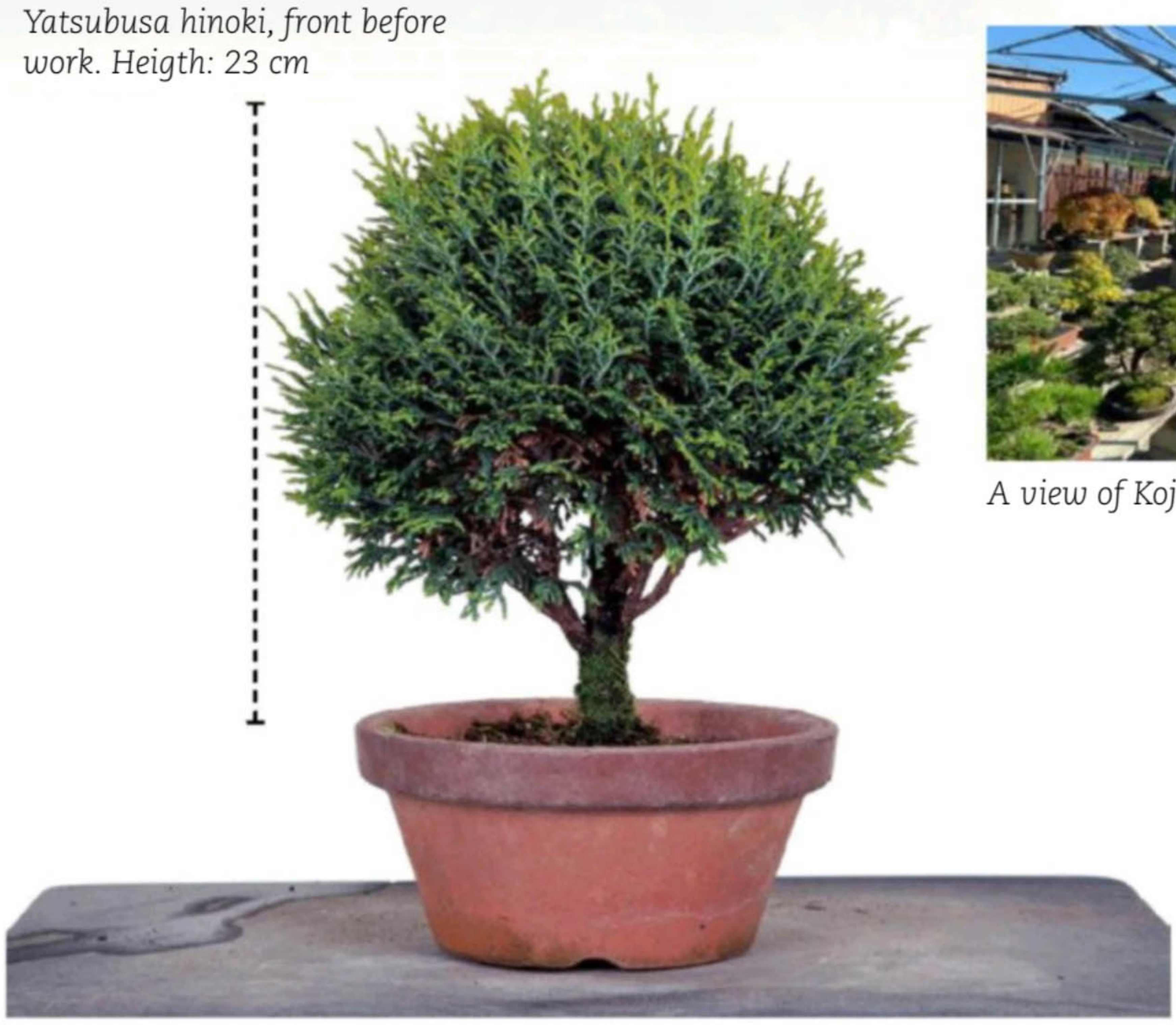
Sometimes you have to make decisions very early on, so that things are going in the right direction. A characterless, one-in-a-dozen hinoki can be made into something interesting if we make the right decisions now

This is a hinoki cypress with dwarf or, as the Japanese say, 'yatsubusa' characteristics, grown from a cutting. The dense branching clearly showcases the dense budding tendencies and appear typical of the yatsubusa variety.

It appears that, so far, the tree has been grown with a classic upright trunk form in mind. Characteristic of hinoki, but at present, it shows a similar shape from all angles, suggesting that a definitive front and overall design concept have yet to be established. If the tree is to be developed further as a shohin bonsai, it is important to determine a front and the key branches as early as possible.

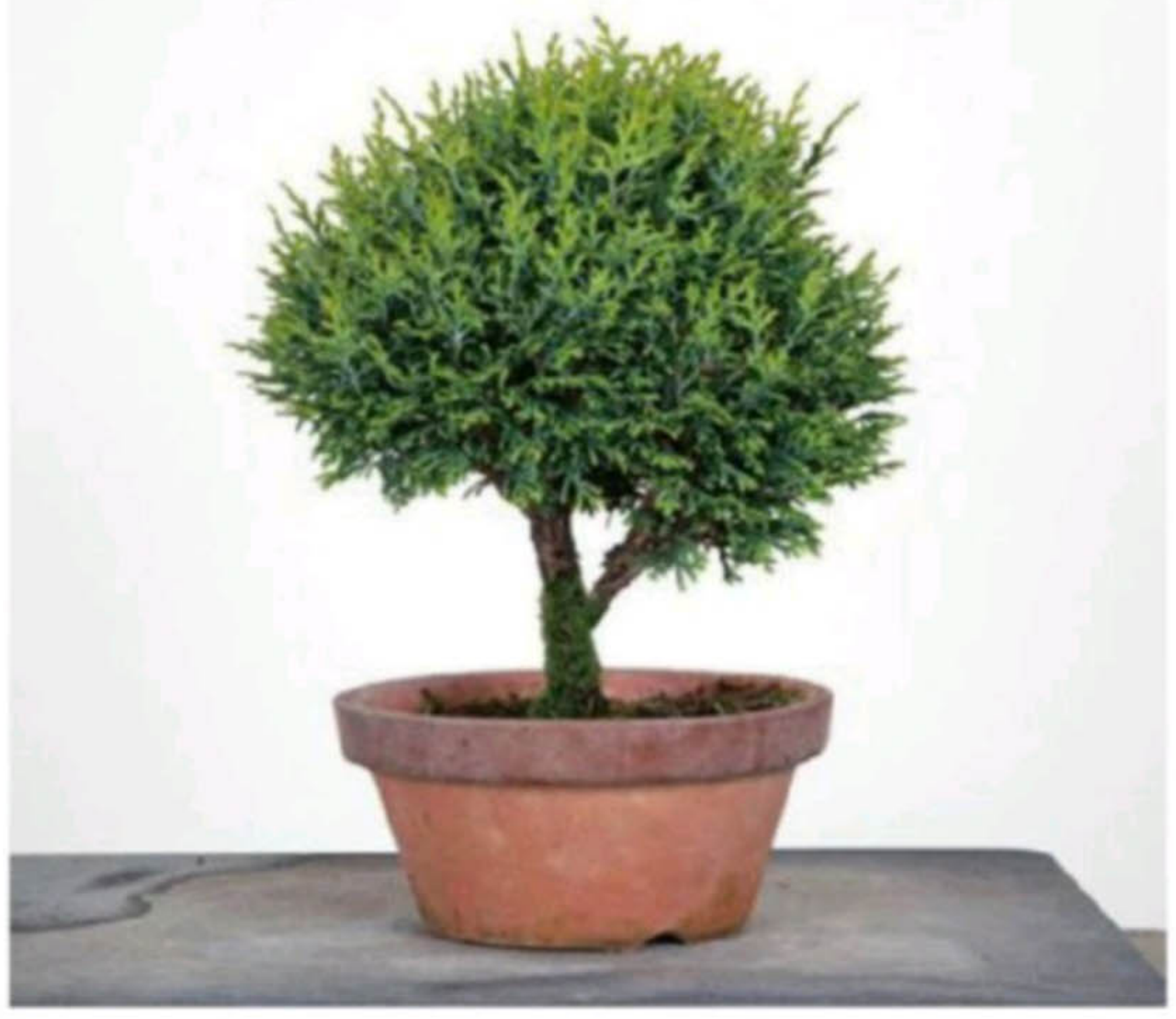
Analysing the tree, all sides look the same, or do they?

Yatsubusa hinoki, front before work. Heigth: 23 cm

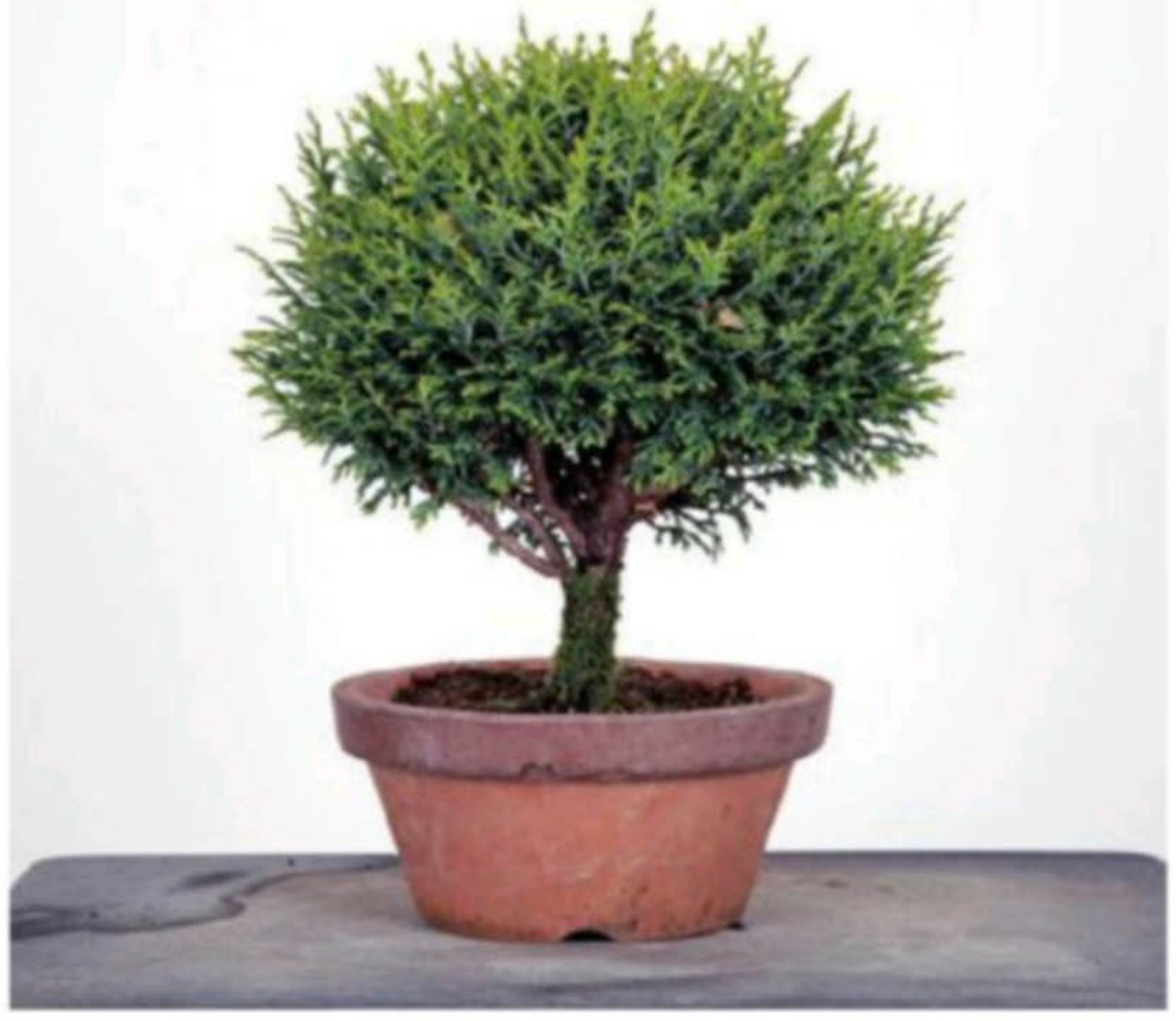


A view of Koji's nursery

Left side view before work



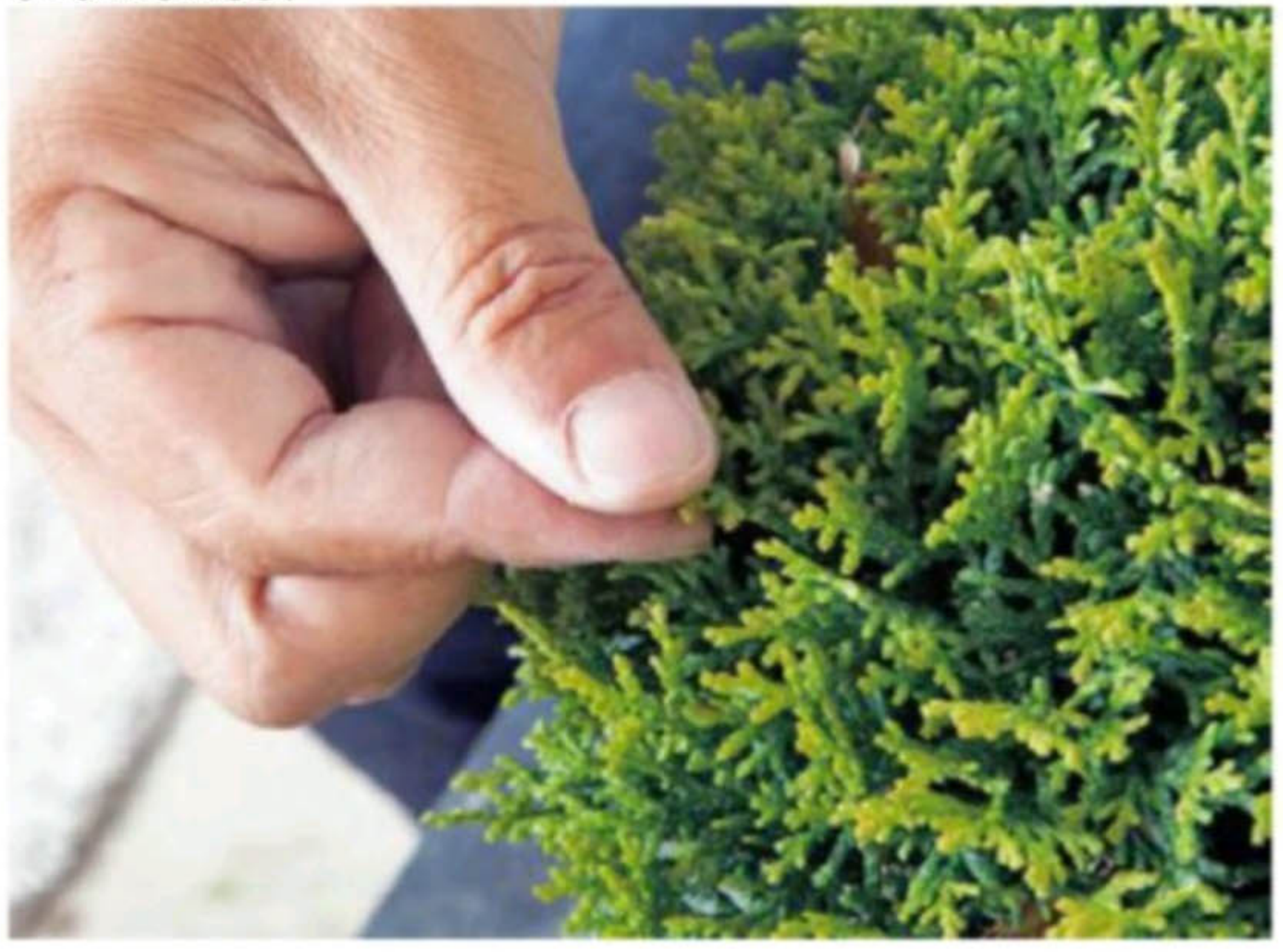
Right side view before work



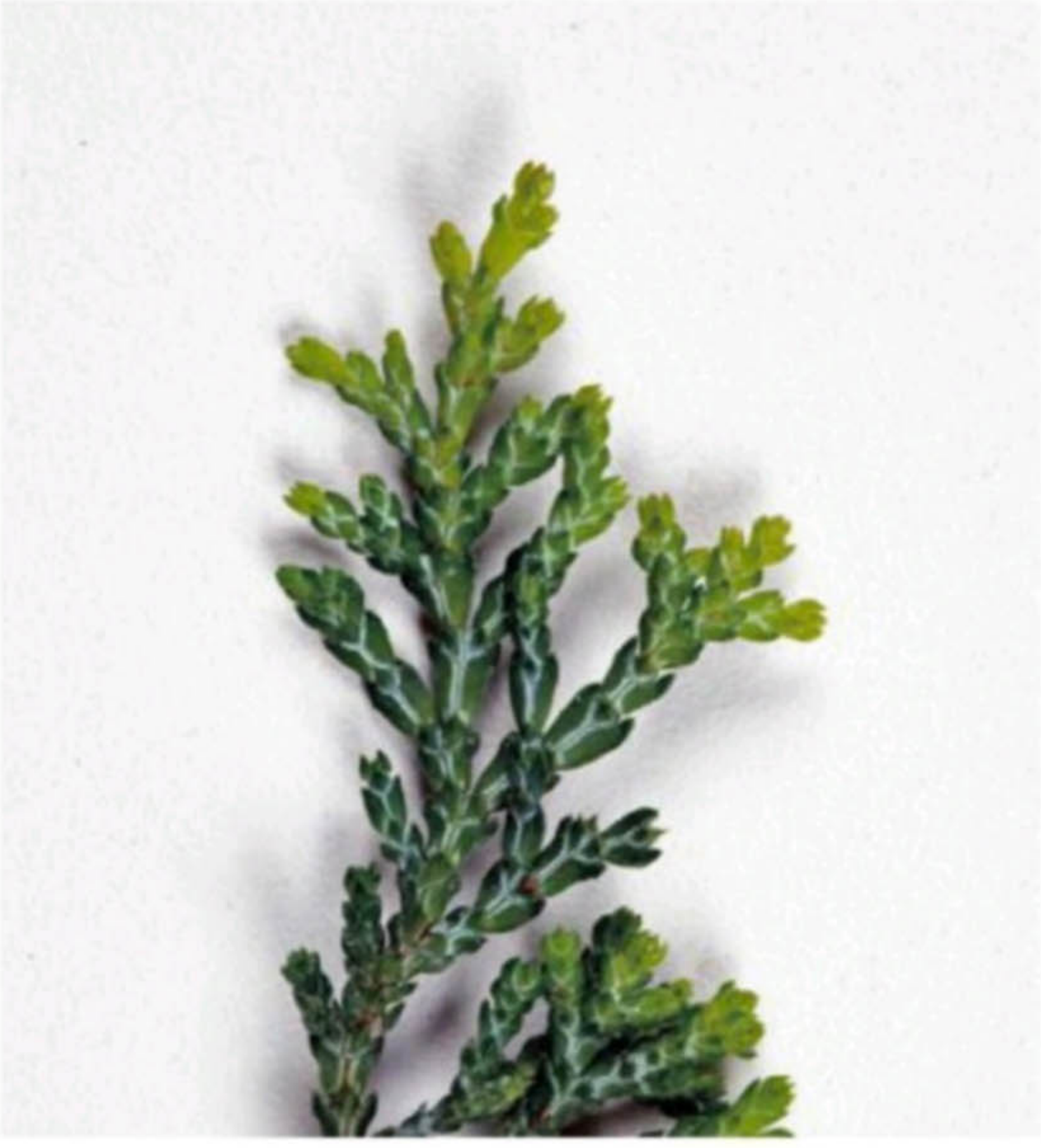
Yatsubusa hinoki:
Pruning branches to establish the basic tree shape

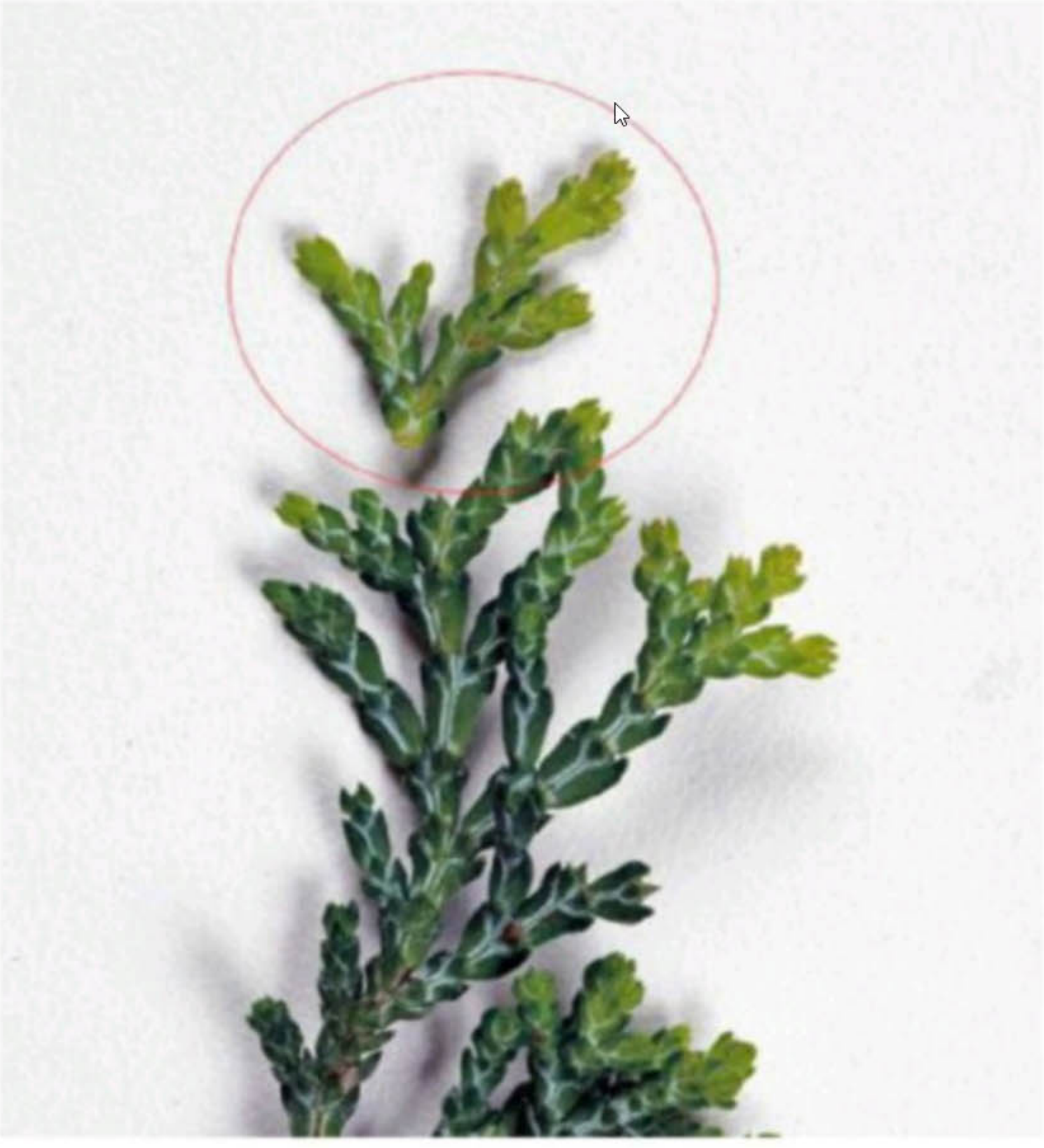
This is small-sized yatsubusa hinoki bonsai material recently acquired by Koji Matsusue. It is thought to be around 15 years old from cuttings. Despite its thin trunk, the bark shows signs of age, and it has the appealing characteristics of the yatsubusa variety; a compact outline and a large number of buds and branches. Although new shoots that grew in spring have caused the outline to become a bit untidy, the current shape already has a rough silhouette suitable for either a formal upright or informal upright style. However, many branches remain, and there is no indication that a clear front or main branches were determined before it was acquired. In order to establish a fundamental design concept and begin branch development, Koji started the process by thinning out the overcrowded branches.

Koji Matsusue pinching off the tip of a new bud with his fingers


By pinching and pulling the tip of a bud, the new soft, light green growth can be easily removed

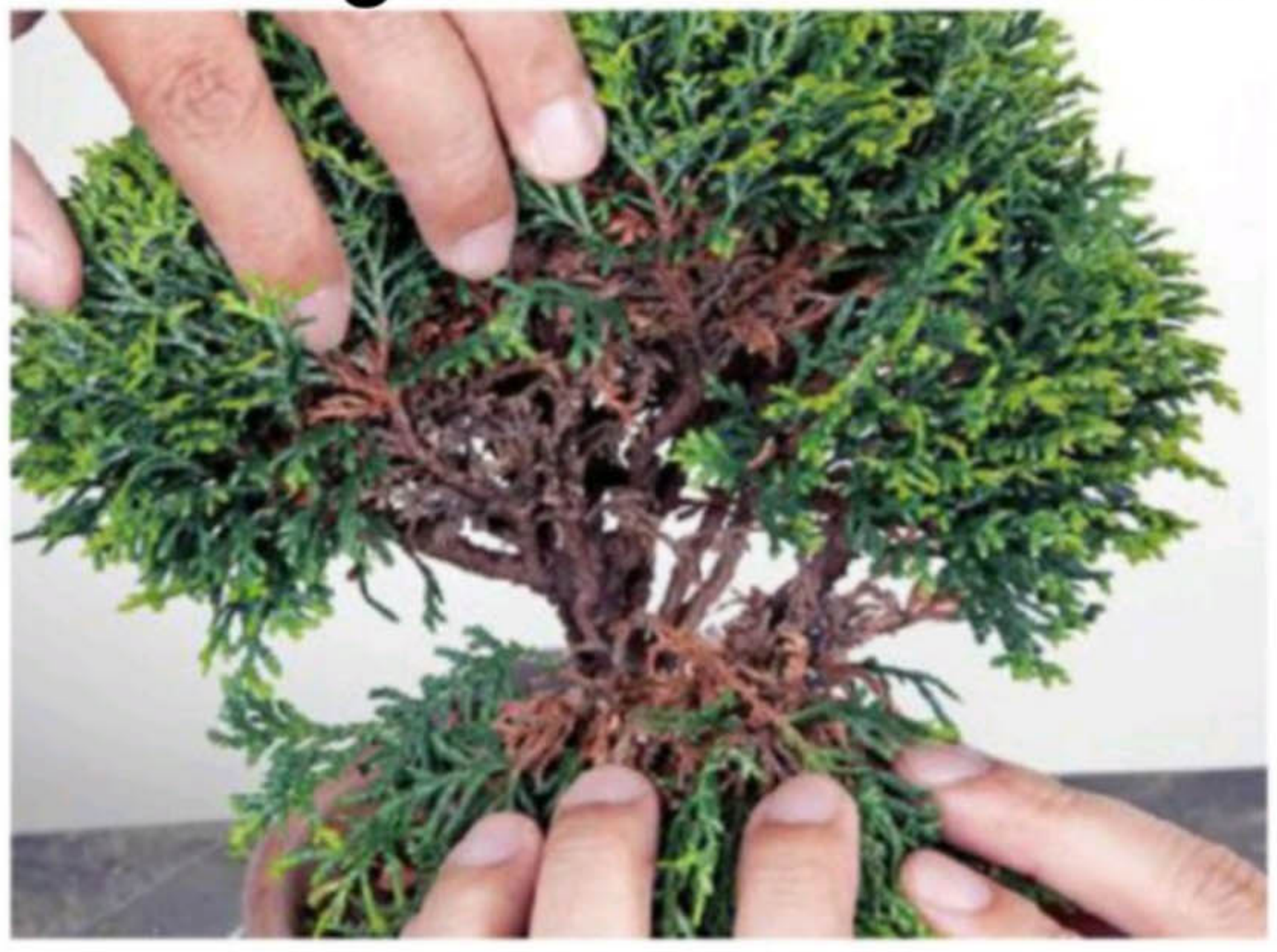
Basic bud pinching for hinoki

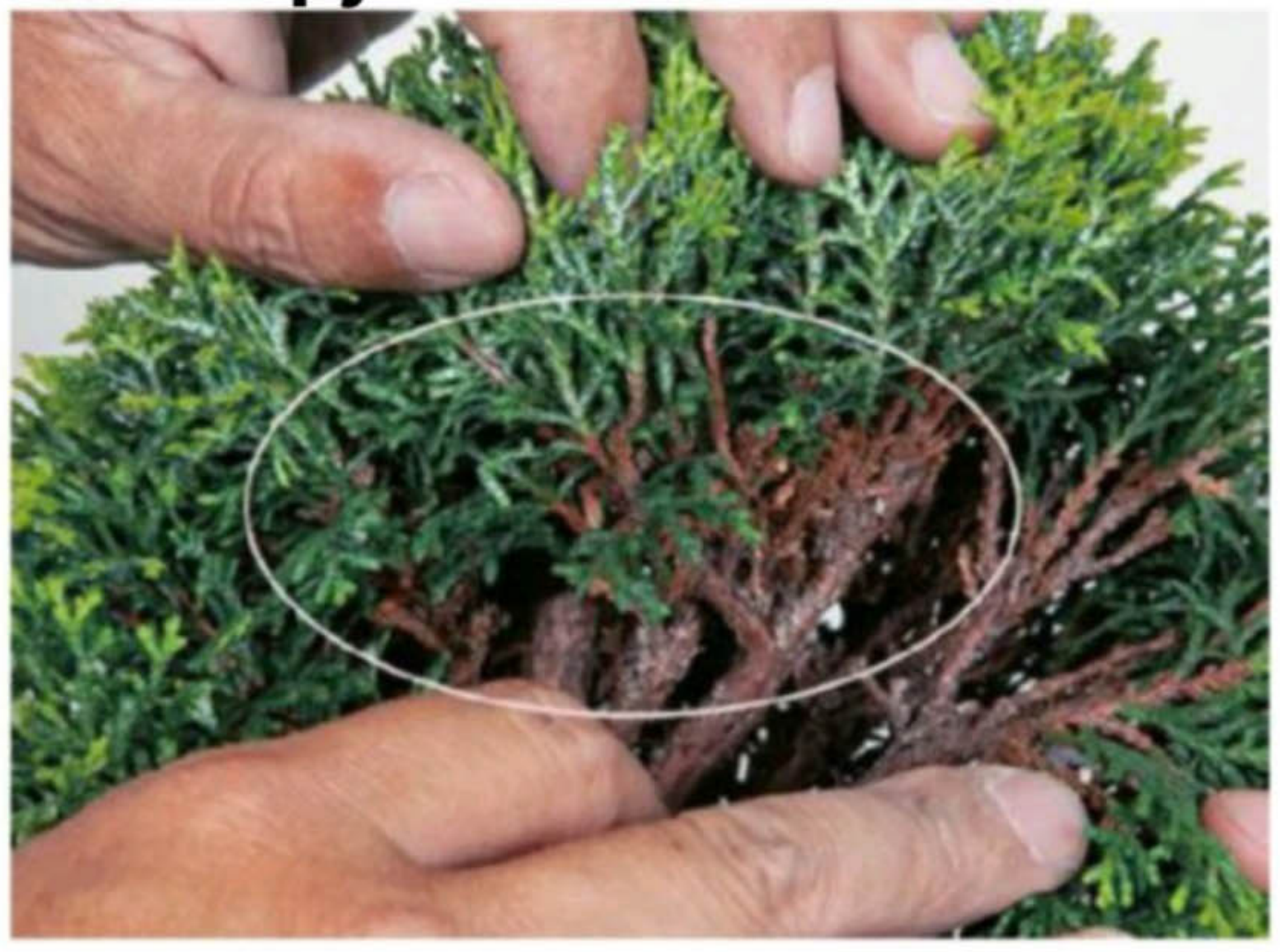

Condition of the buds before the work (right). The light green part at the tip is the new shoot

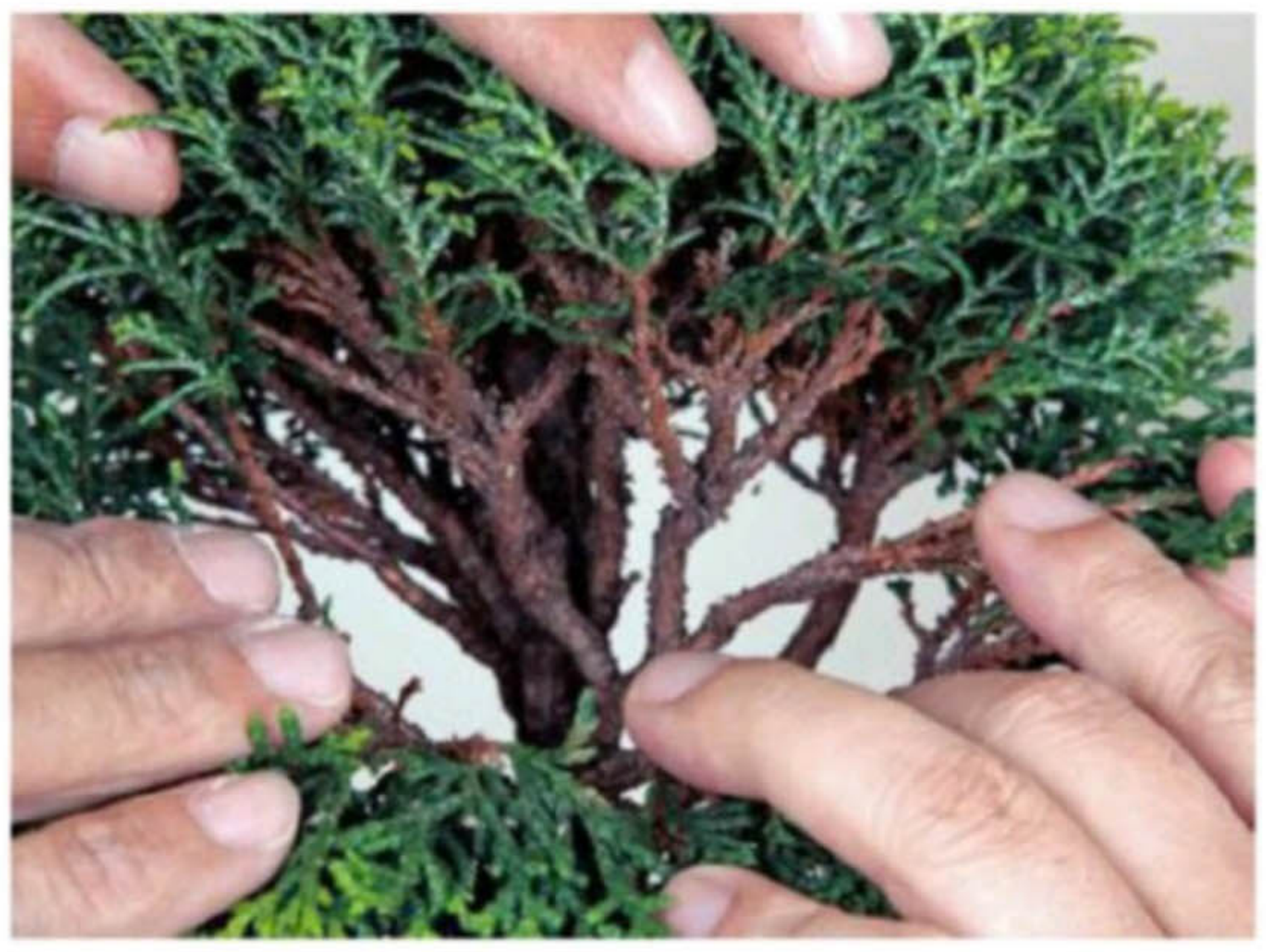

Pinching and pulling this part by hand is the basic method of bud pinching

The outer parts of the tree with good sun exposure have vigorous, healthy buds growing actively. However, when checking the inner areas by parting the branches, many dead brown branches were found. Hinoki trees naturally have a tendency to become crowded, and the Yatsubusa variety in particular produces buds readily. Without regular pruning, the number of branches quickly increases, blocking the sunlight and airflow to the interior, resulting in dieback of inner shoots. Koji carefully removed the brown, discoloured inner buds and selectively thinned out downward-facing buds to improve overall growing conditions.

Removing dead branches inside the canopy

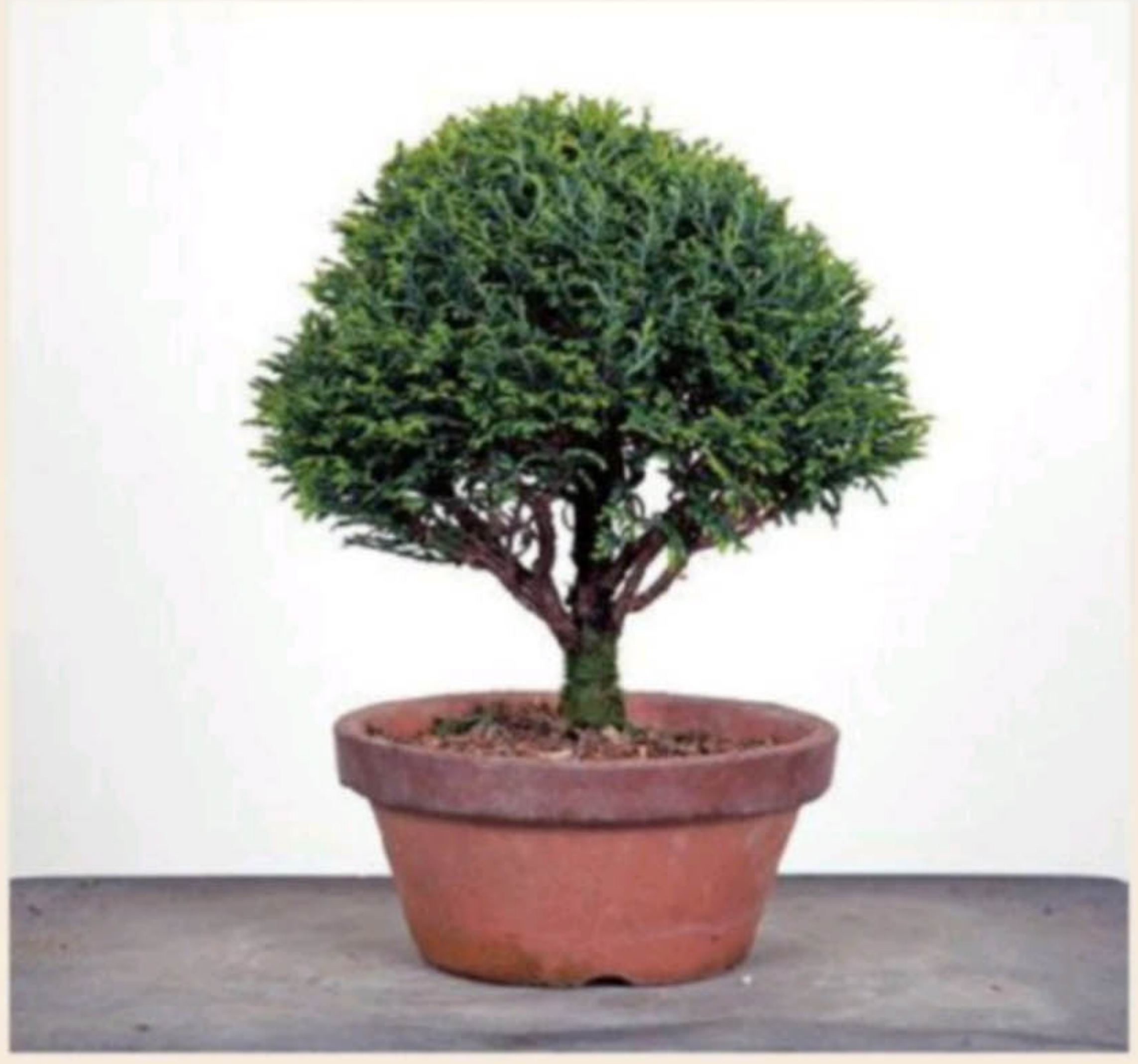

Branches in the inner part of the tree where sunlight and airflow are blocked have died. The yatsubusa varieties with many buds are especially prone to this


Overcrowded areas and downward-facing buds that are unnecessary for the design (circled) are thinned out to improve growing conditions


After thinning, the bases of branches are cleaned up, making it easier to see the condition of the fine branches

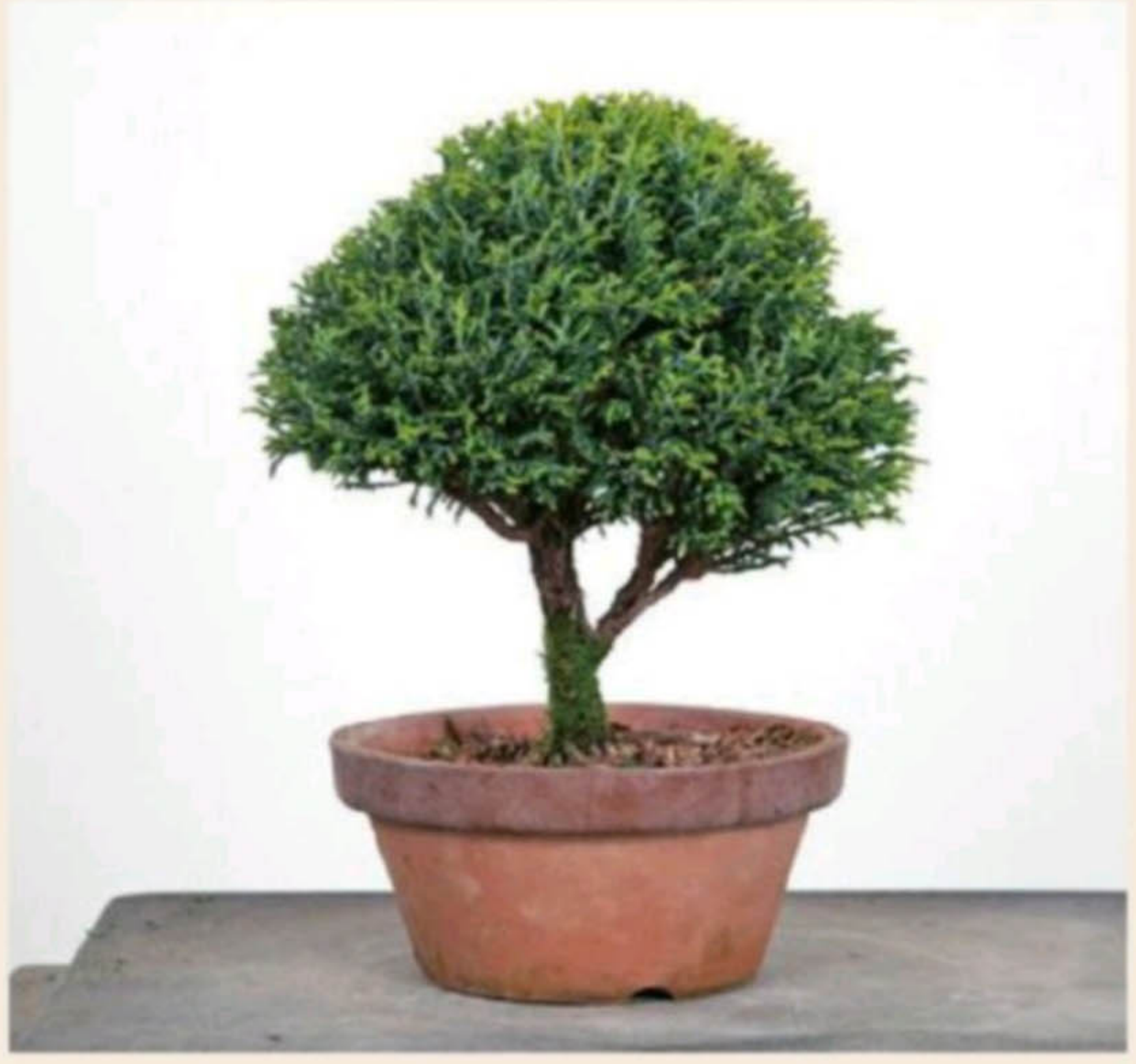
Three possible fronts based on trunk movement and branch placement

Option 1: Former front



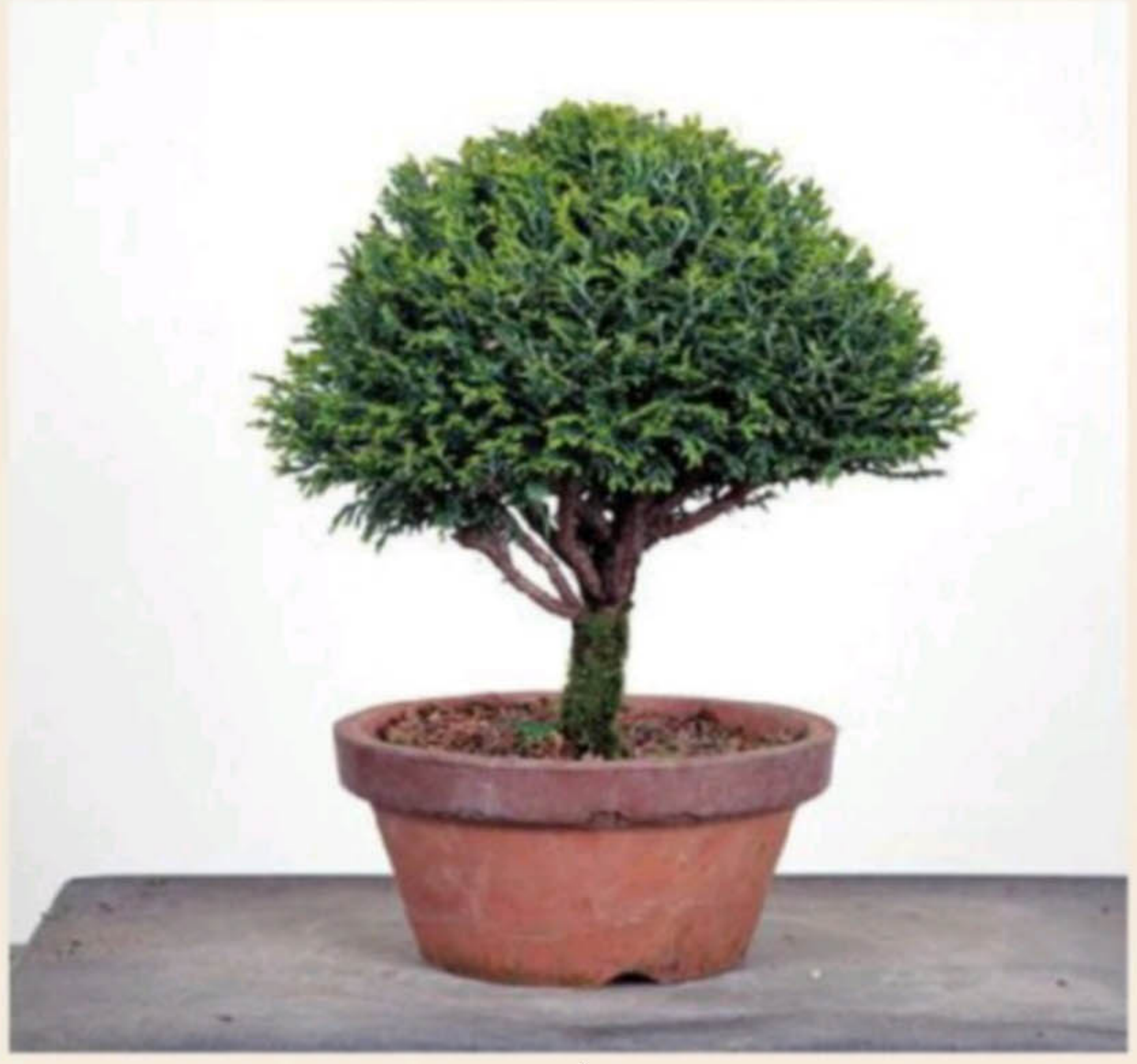
Branches that could serve as the lower branch (first branch) extend to both left and right, and the trunk's shape is straightforward. The upper section is hidden by foliage and not clearly visible, but from the base to the midsection, there are no branches protruding in front that obscure the trunk movement, giving the impression that it's easy to style.
If there are no better front options, it seems best to proceed with shaping from the original front

Option 2: Former left side



Viewed about 45 degrees counter-clockwise from the original front. The thick branch that would have been the left first branch in the original front, now flows to the right, giving it potential as a unique feature that could support a twin-trunk style composition. However, for a twin-trunk form, the branching point is not ideal, and since there are no lower branches on the left side, it may give a somewhat top-heavy impression

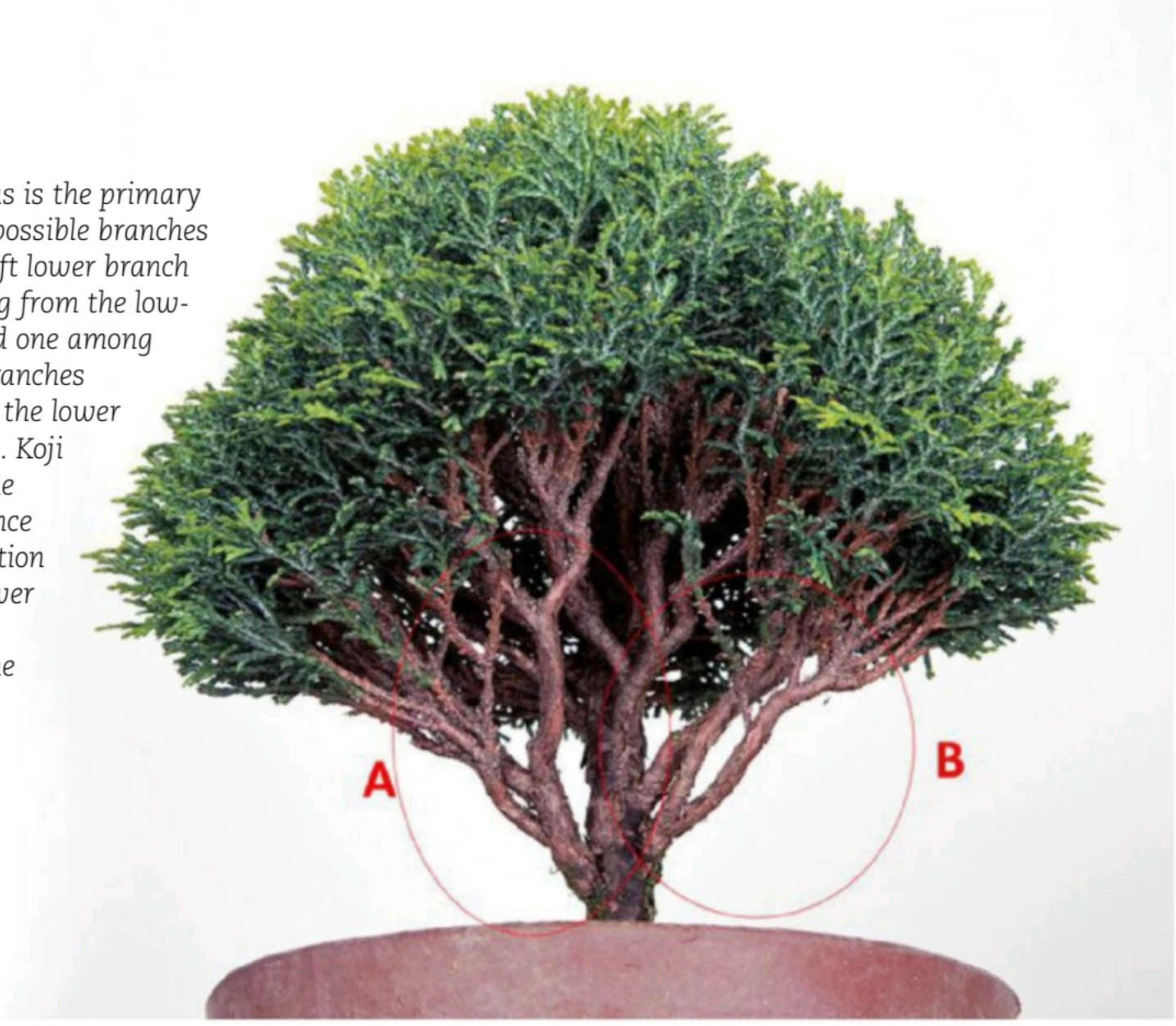
Option 3: Former right side



Viewed about 45 degrees clockwise from the original front. This is almost the reverse of the second possible front, but compared to the right-side branches in that option, the left-side group of branches that could be used as lower branches here seem slightly weaker. The planting angle also tilts upward to the right, so it would require either correcting the angle to create a formal upright or styling it as a slanting trunk. But, neither approach seems likely to improve the tree's overall appearance, therefore making this option the weakest of the three

Option 1 is the best: a formal upright from the original front

The first focus is the primary branch. The possible branches are a thick left lower branch (A) branching from the lowest point, and one among a group of branches coming from the lower right side (B). Koji prioritized the strong presence and low position of the left lower branch and chose it as the first branch

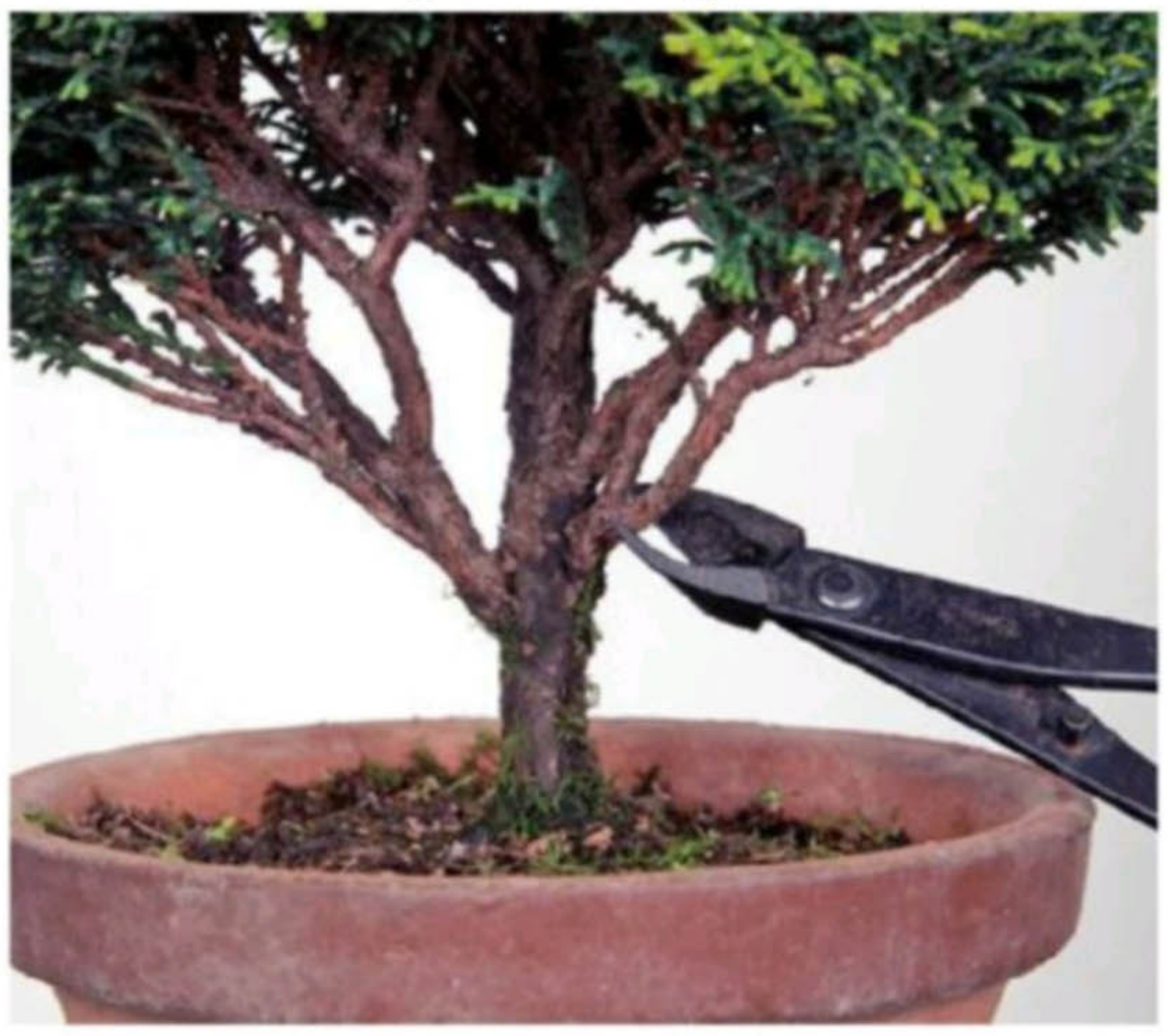


Next step is to select from the excessive number of branches.

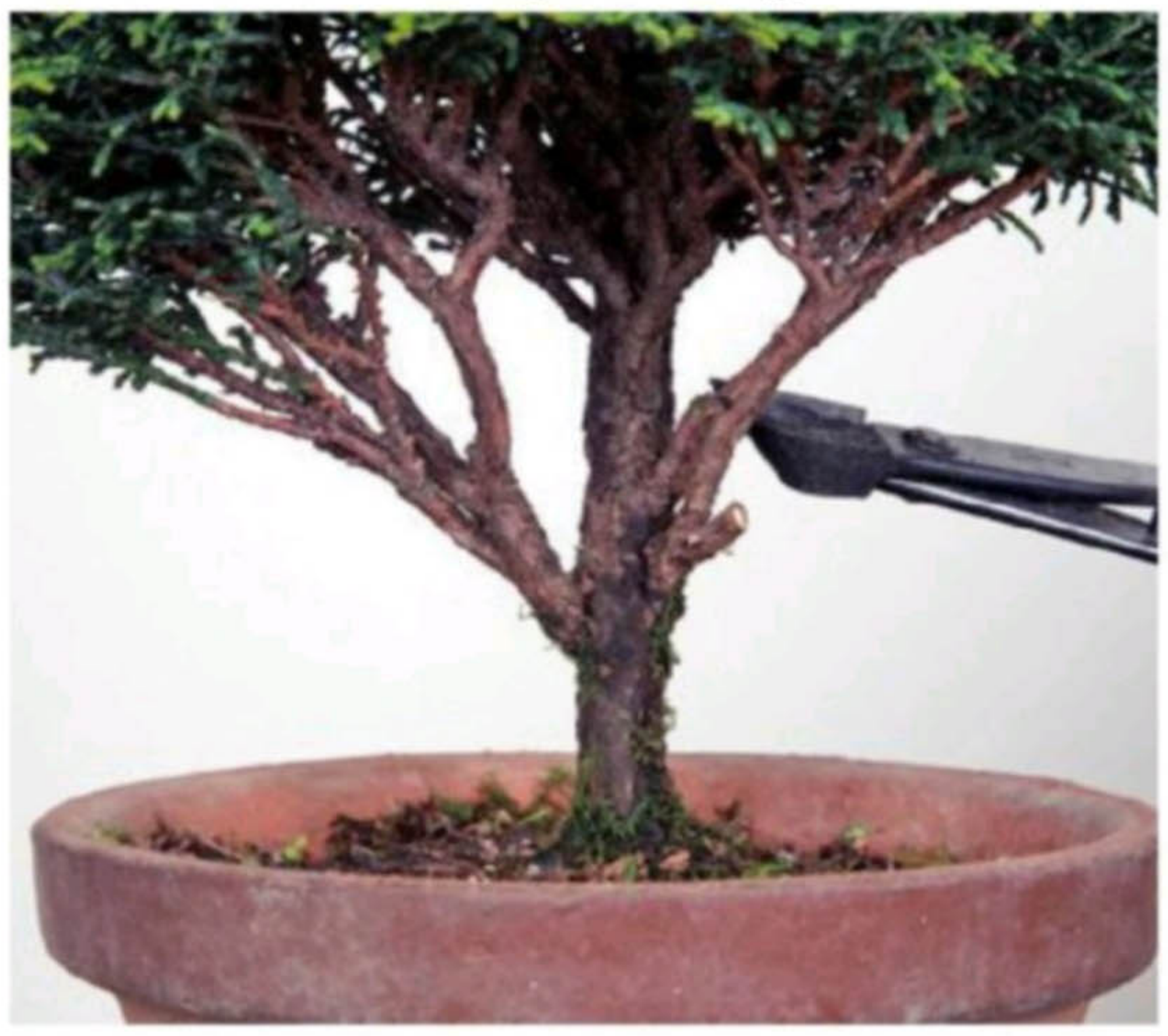
But the first focus is the primary branch. The possible branches are a thick left lower branch (A) branching from the lowest point, and one among a group of branches coming from the lower right side (B). Koji prioritised the strong presence and low position of the left lower branch and chose it as the first branch.

Checking the branch condition from below as seen from the new front. There are two potential first branches, A and B, extending to the left and right. They are at almost the same height, but the left branch is lower and thicker. Taking into account the visual stability expected of a conifer bonsai, the lower-positioned left branch (A) was the one selected as the first branch.

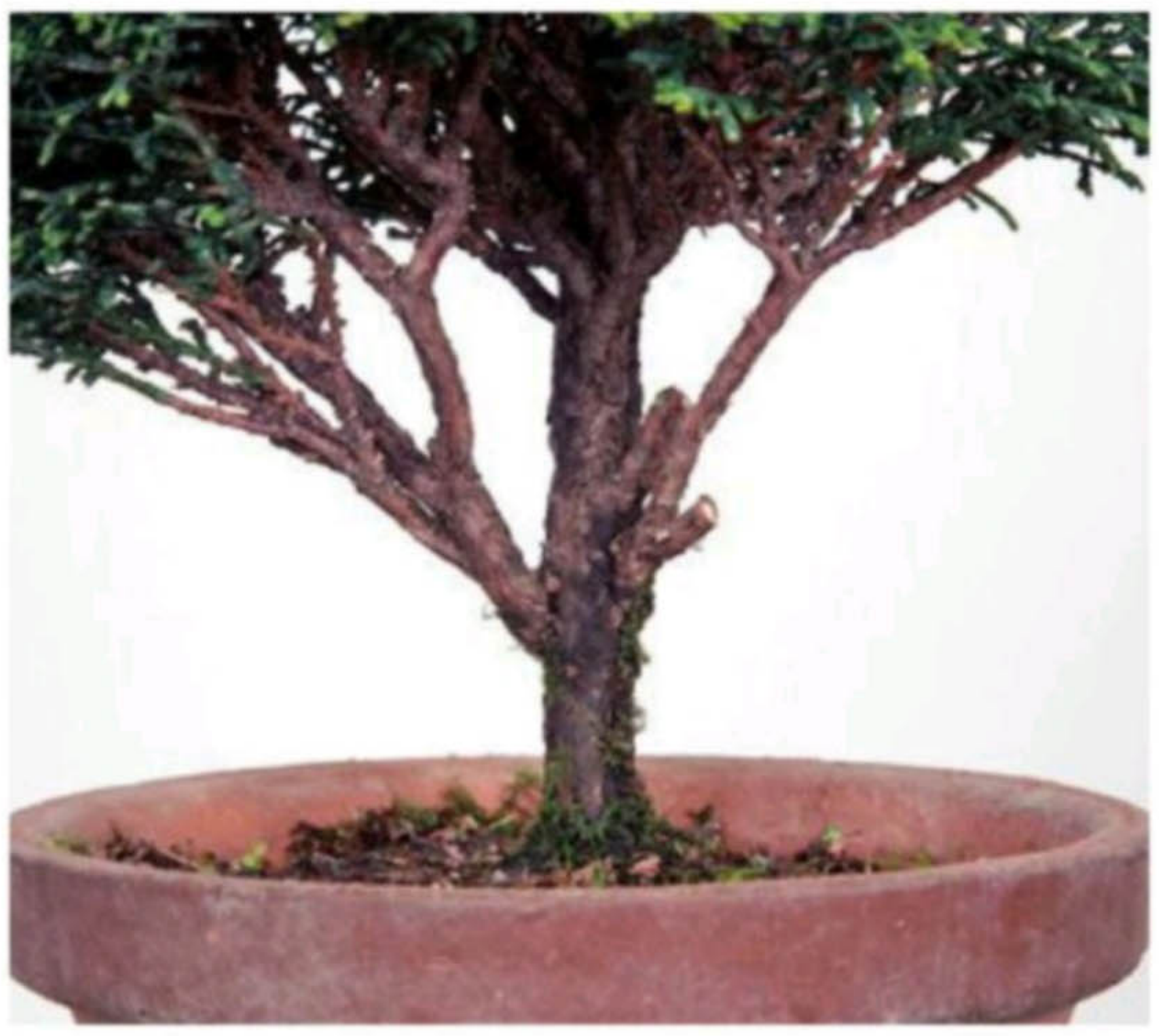
Determining the key branches from the bottom up, using the left first branch as the reference



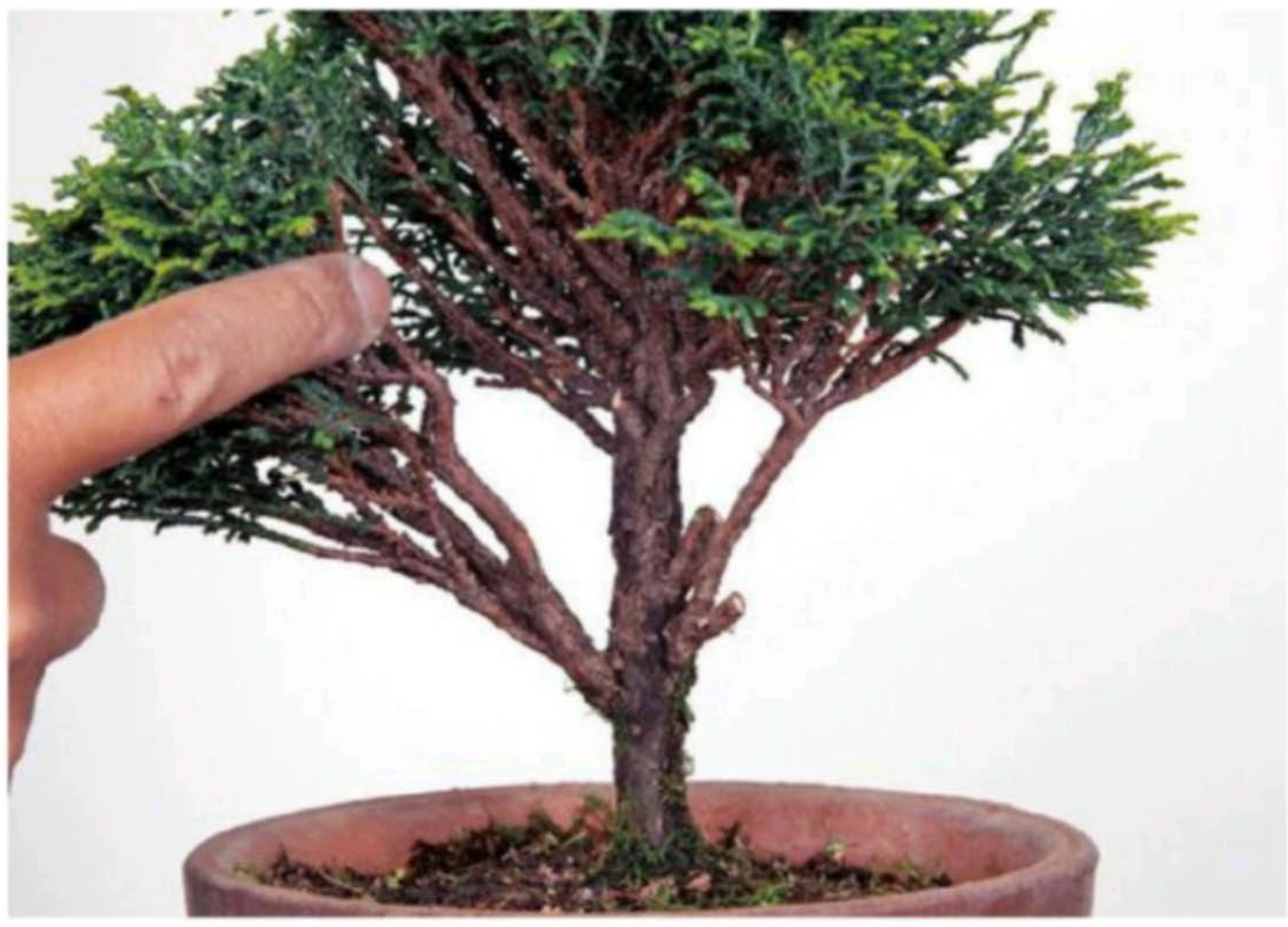
The lowest right branch, roughly the same height as the left first branch, was removed



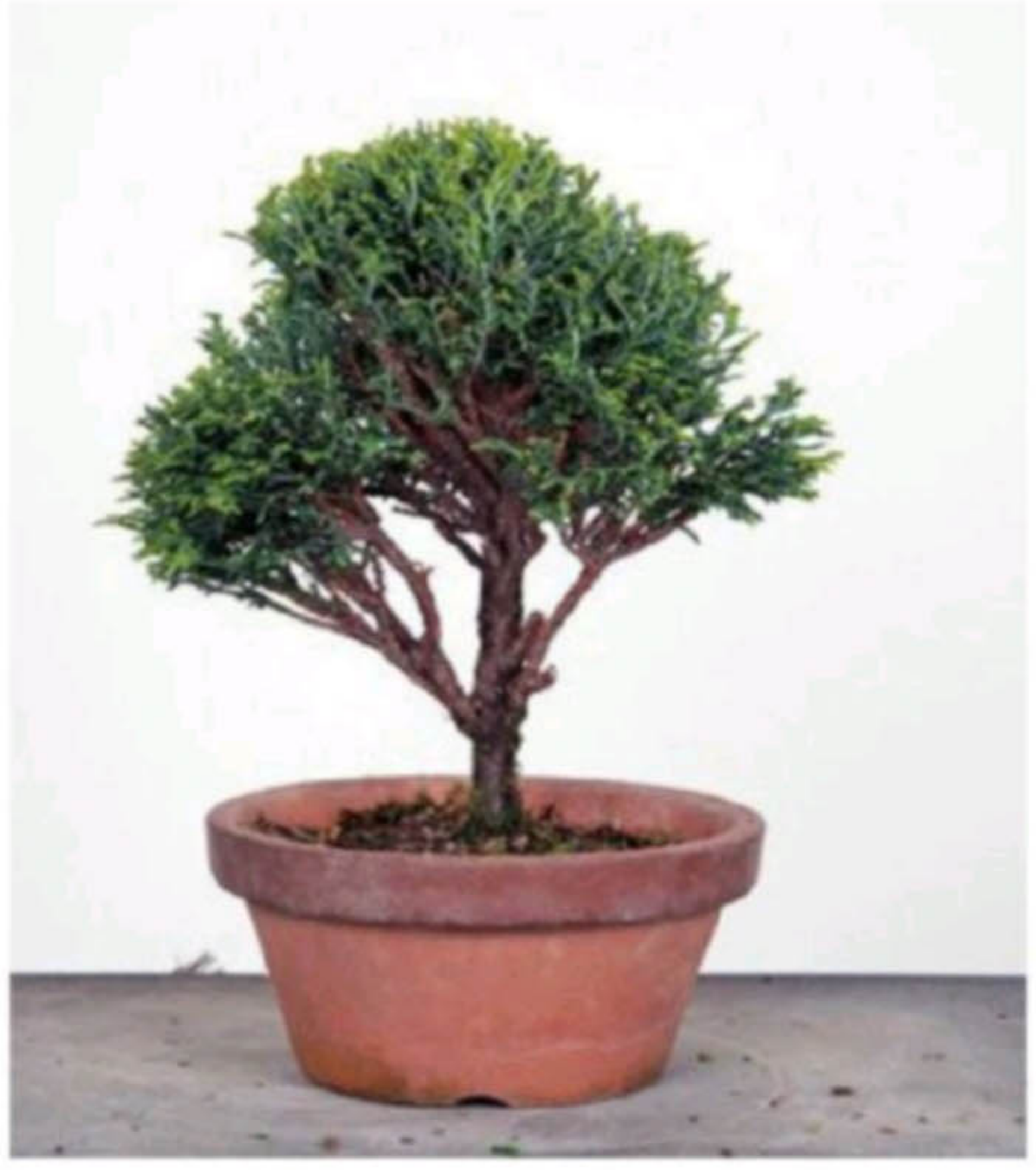
The two remaining right branches are very close at the base and they extend in parallel. Considering the balance with the right branch, the upper one was removed



The lower left and right branches were cleaned up, but the upper part remained congested with multiple branches immerging

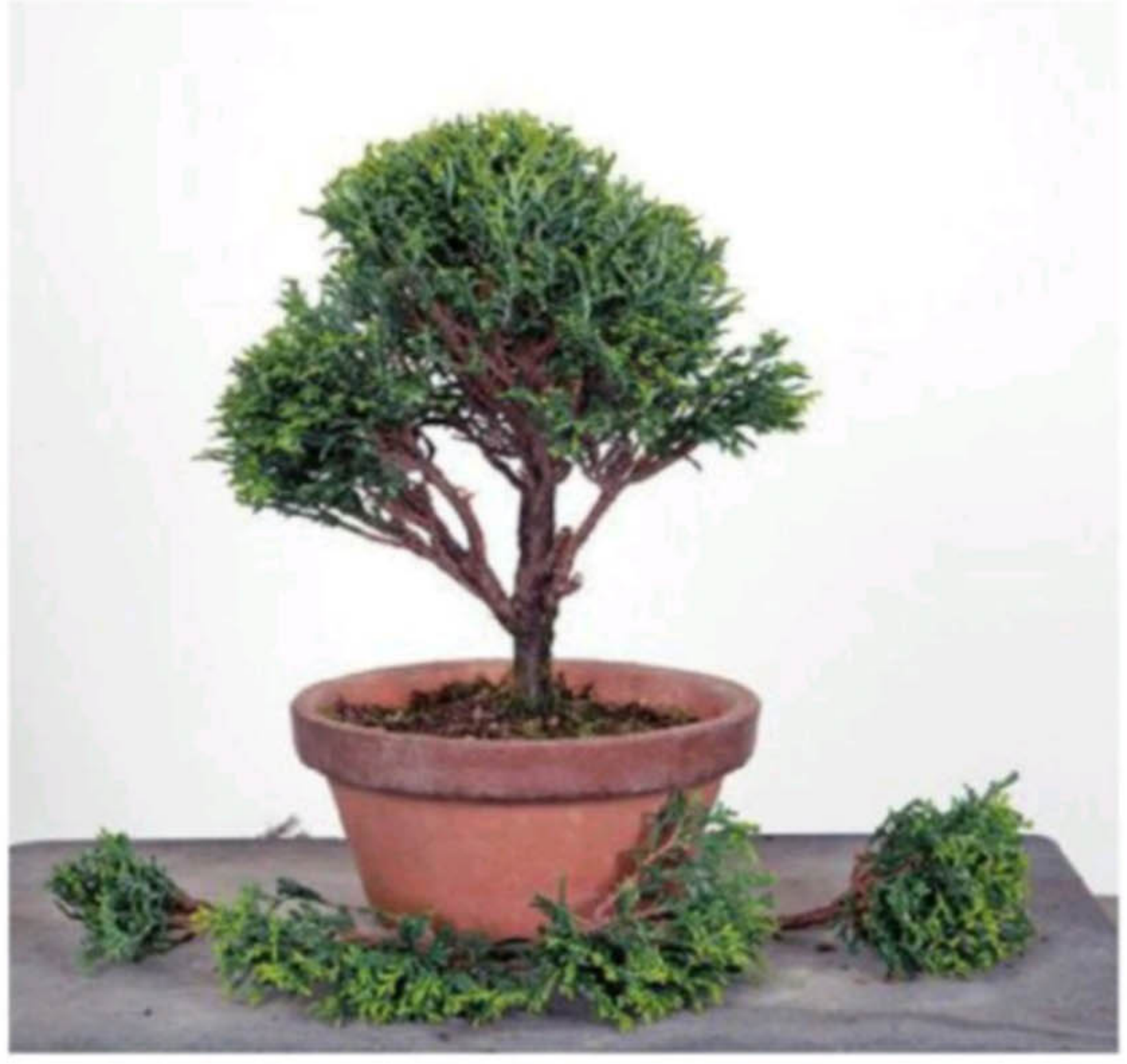


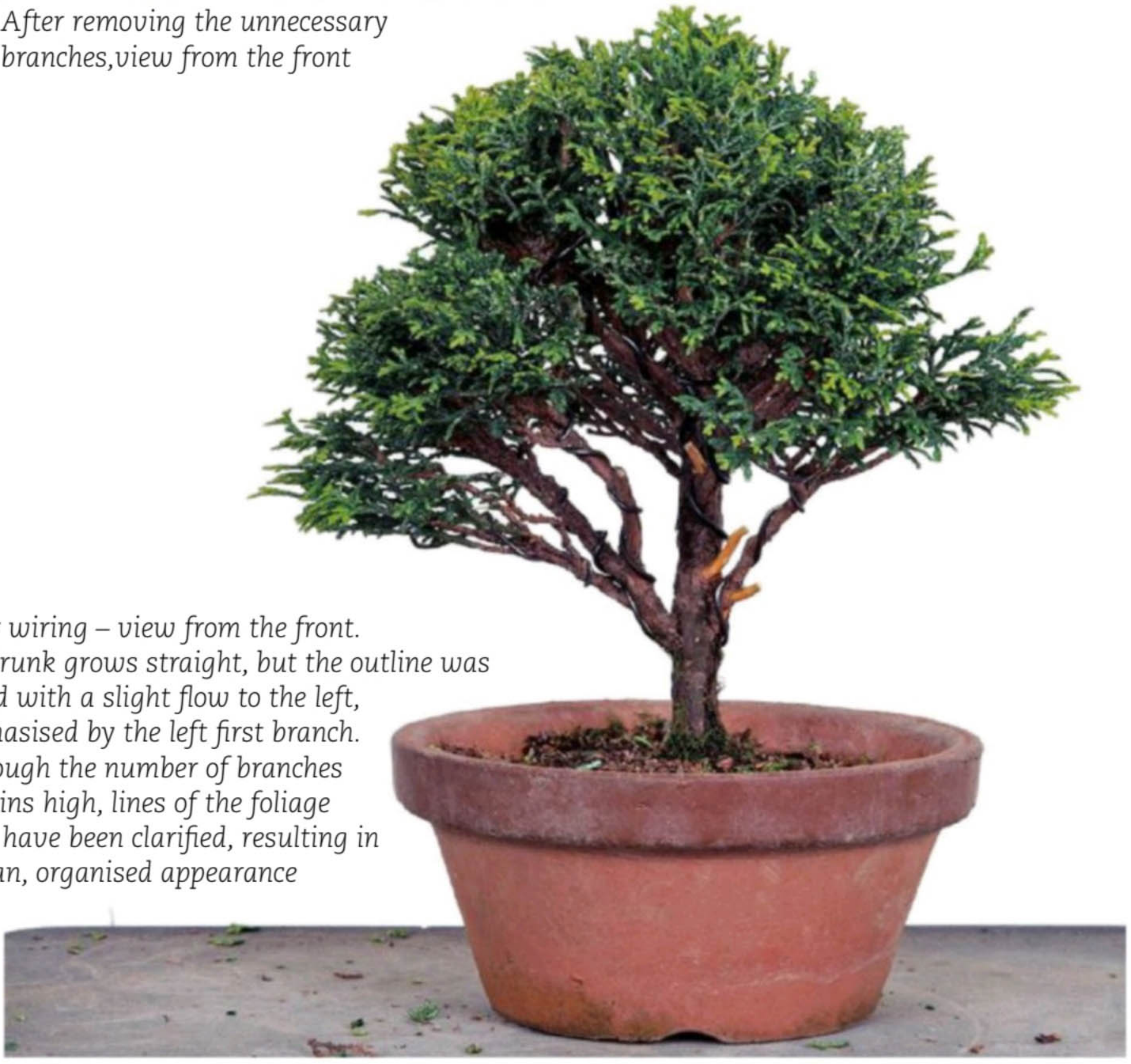
A thick branch growing from the middle was cut off at the base. From here, the remaining branches were adjusted by wiring while checking the overall balance



After removing the unnecessary branches,view from the front

Comparison with the removed branches. About a third of the thick branches were thinned out

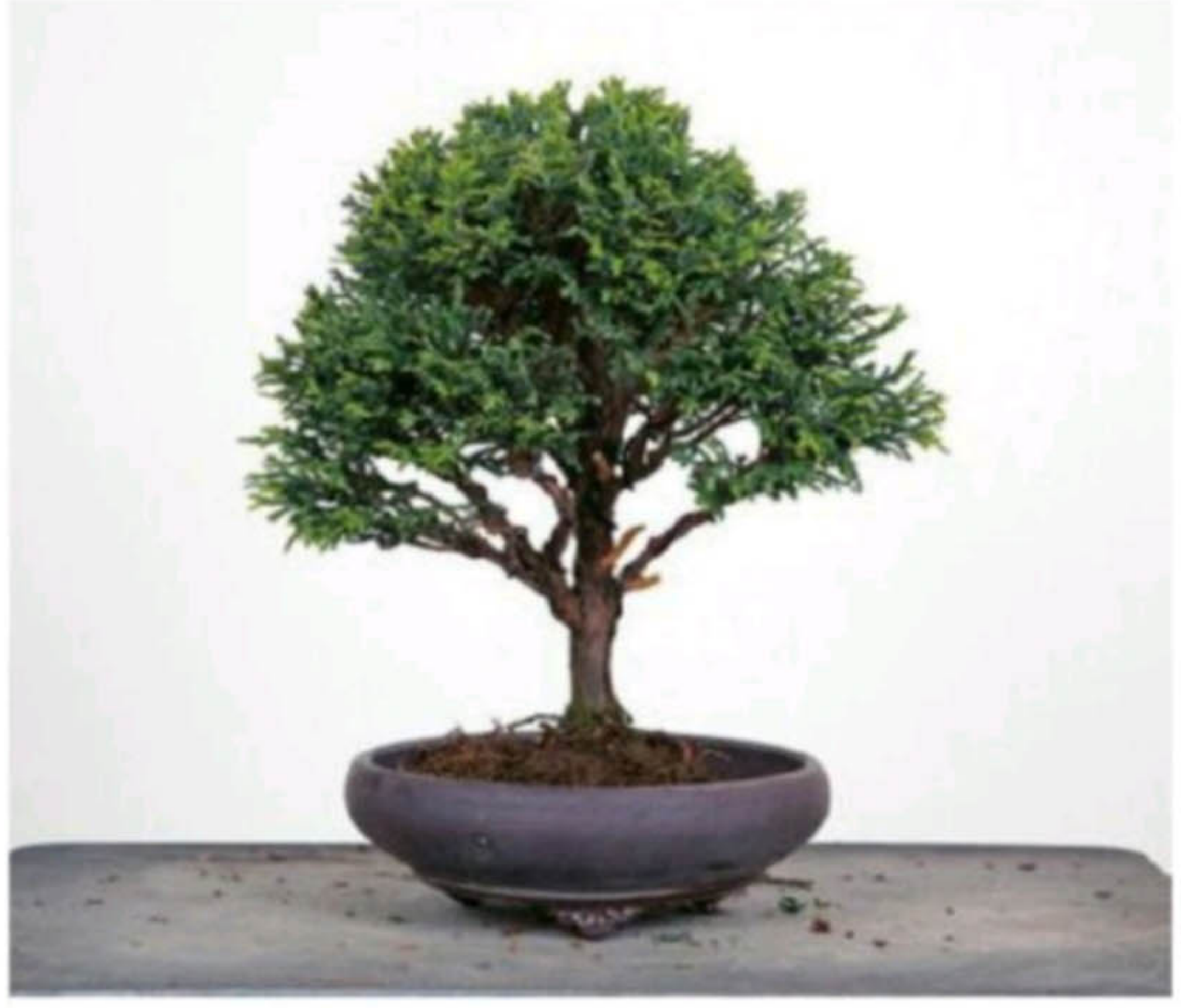


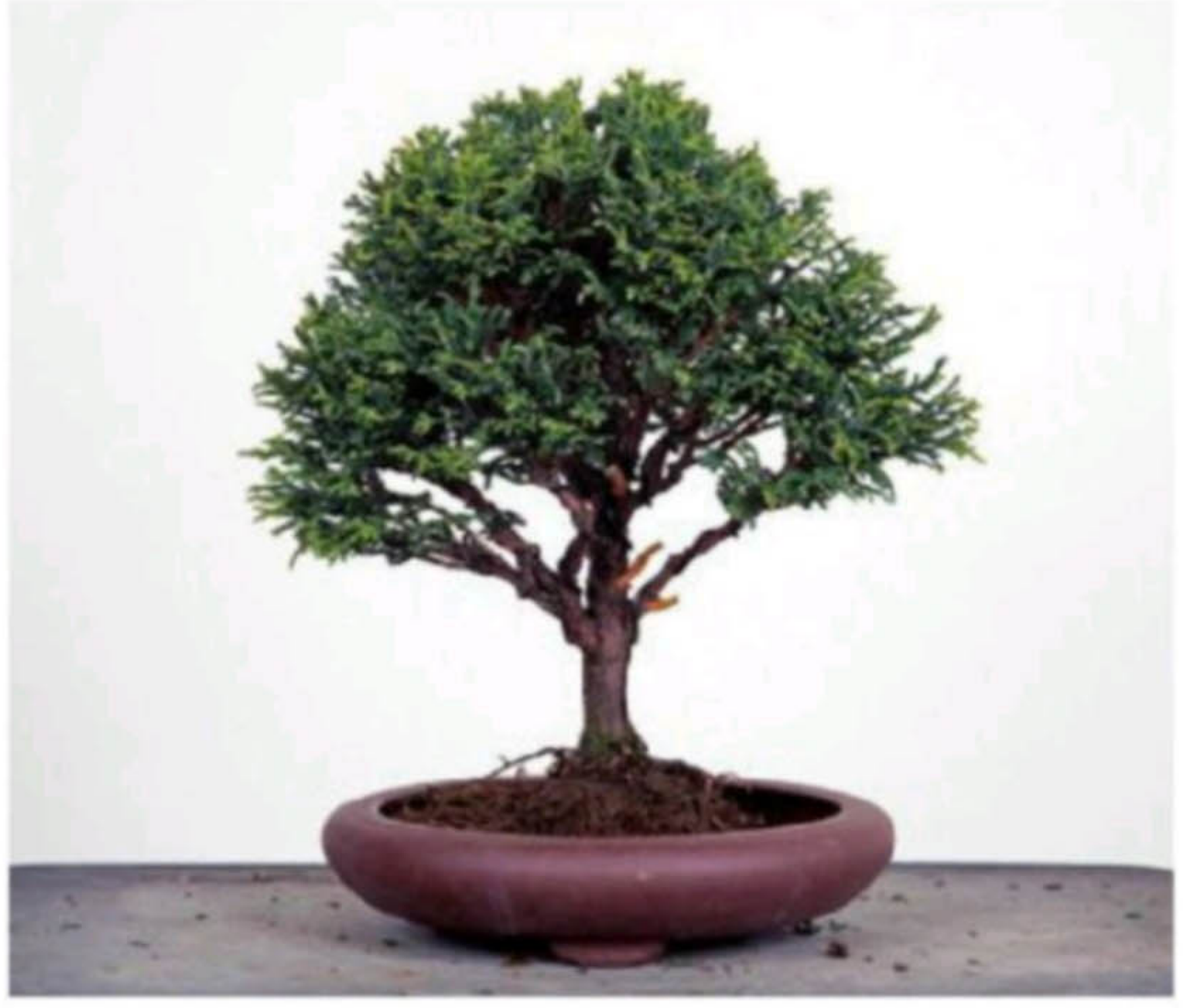


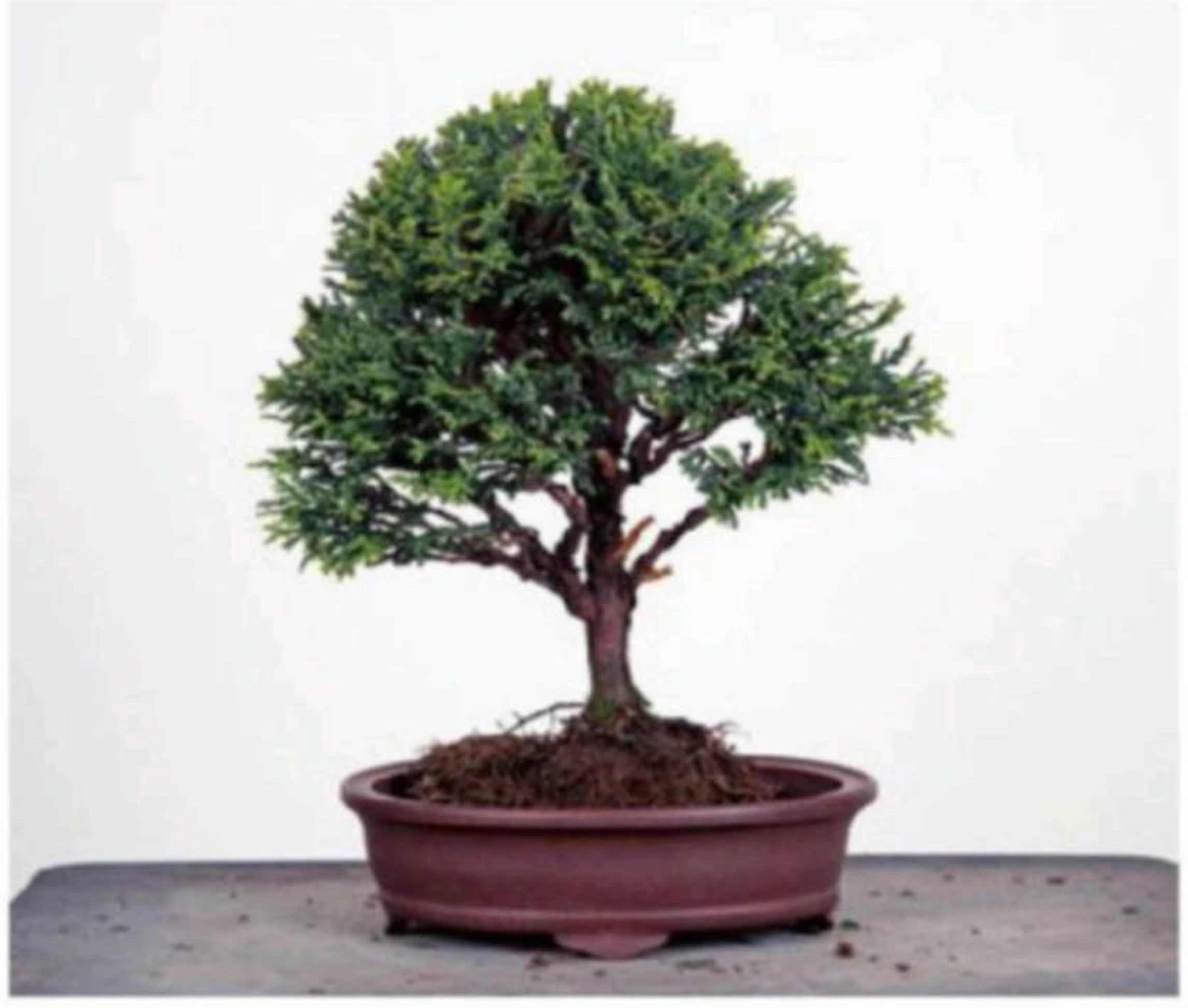
After wiring – view from the front. The trunk grows straight, but the outline was styled with a slight flow to the left, emphasised by the left first branch. Although the number of branches remains high, lines of the foliage pads have been clarified, resulting in a clean, organised appearance

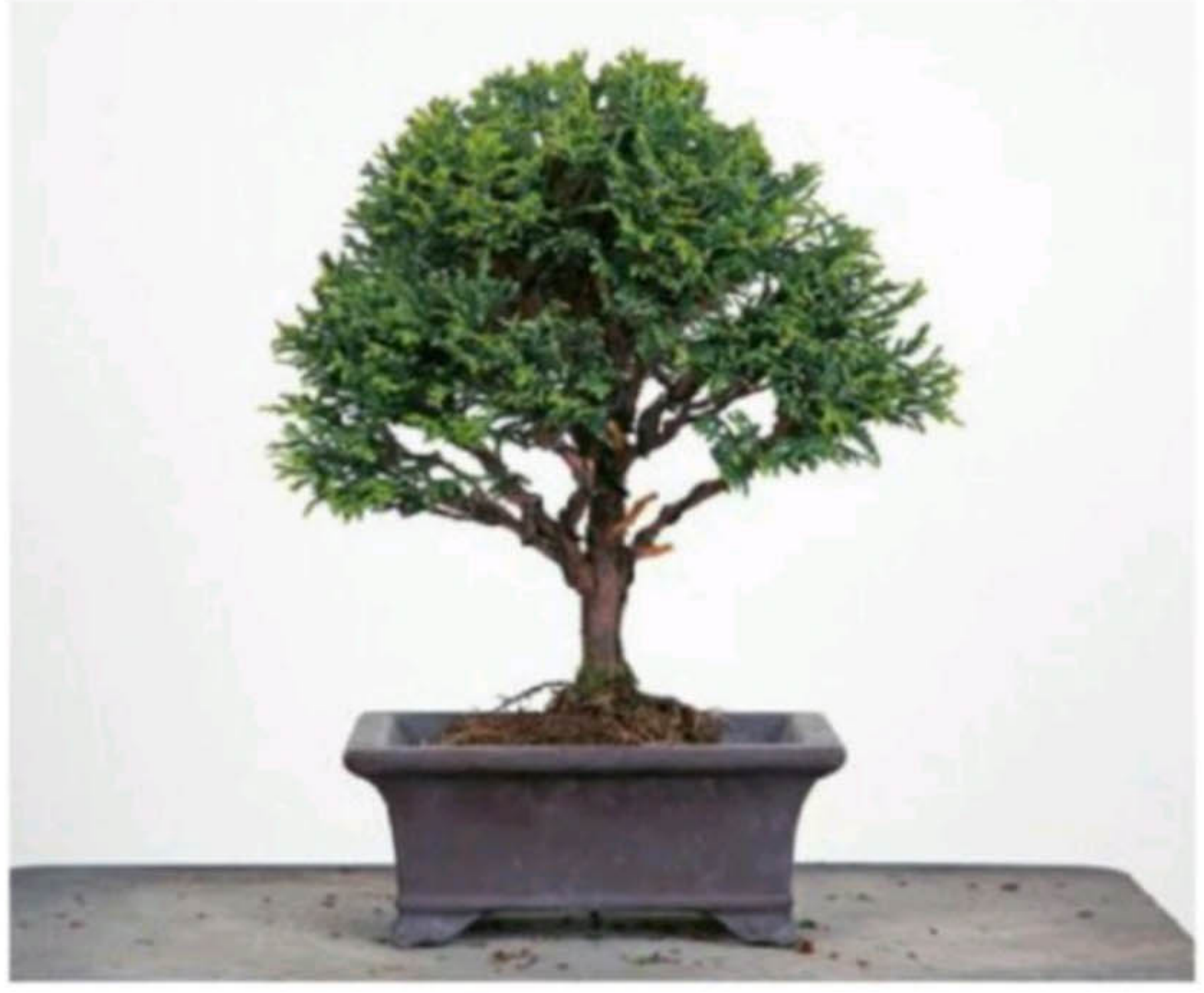
Pot selection that expresses the feel of an expansive landscape unique to formal upright

Standard pot combinations

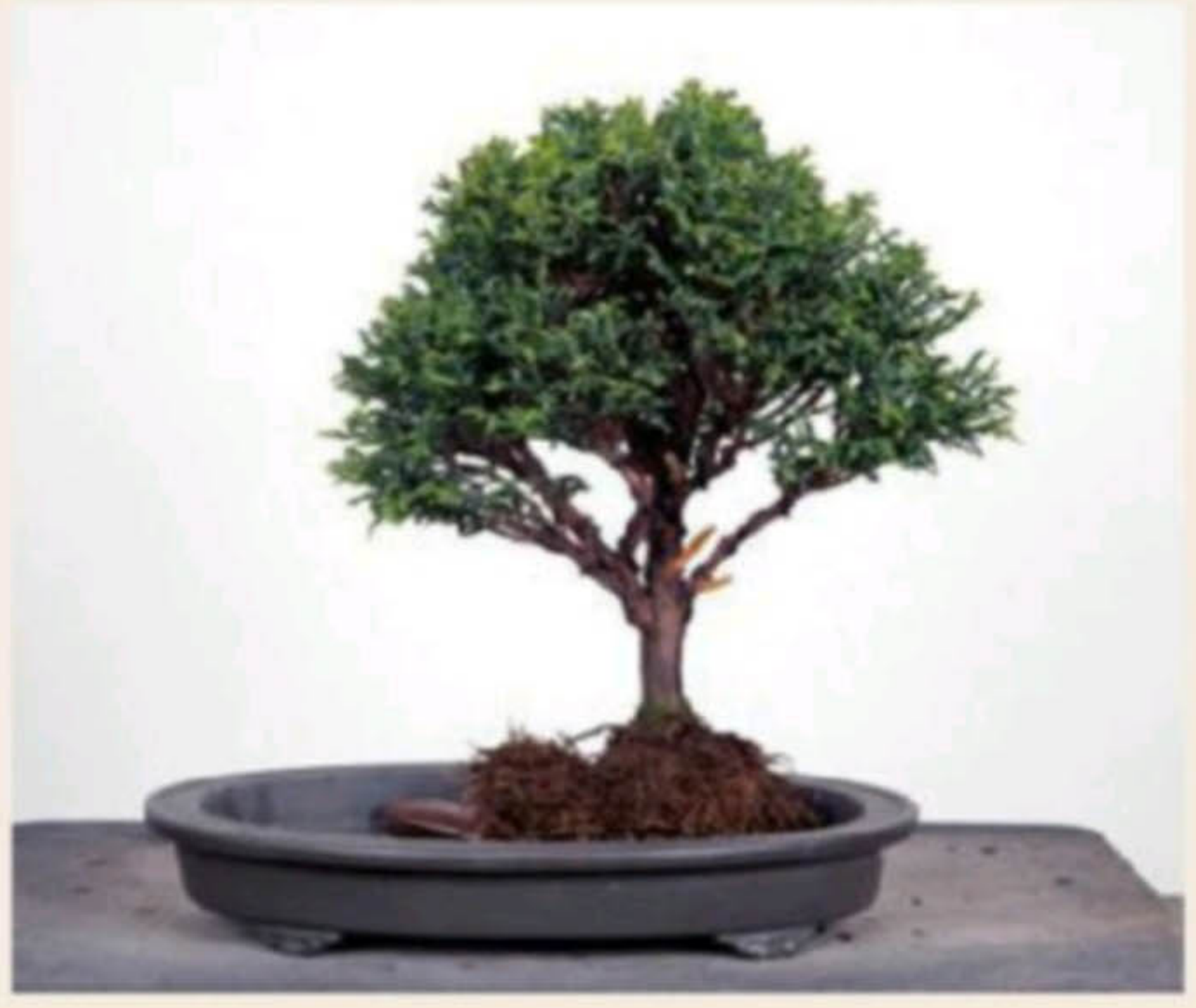

Example A:
A round pot with a distinctive bulge around the body was selected. It gives a slightly deep and heavy impression, but it's not bad overall

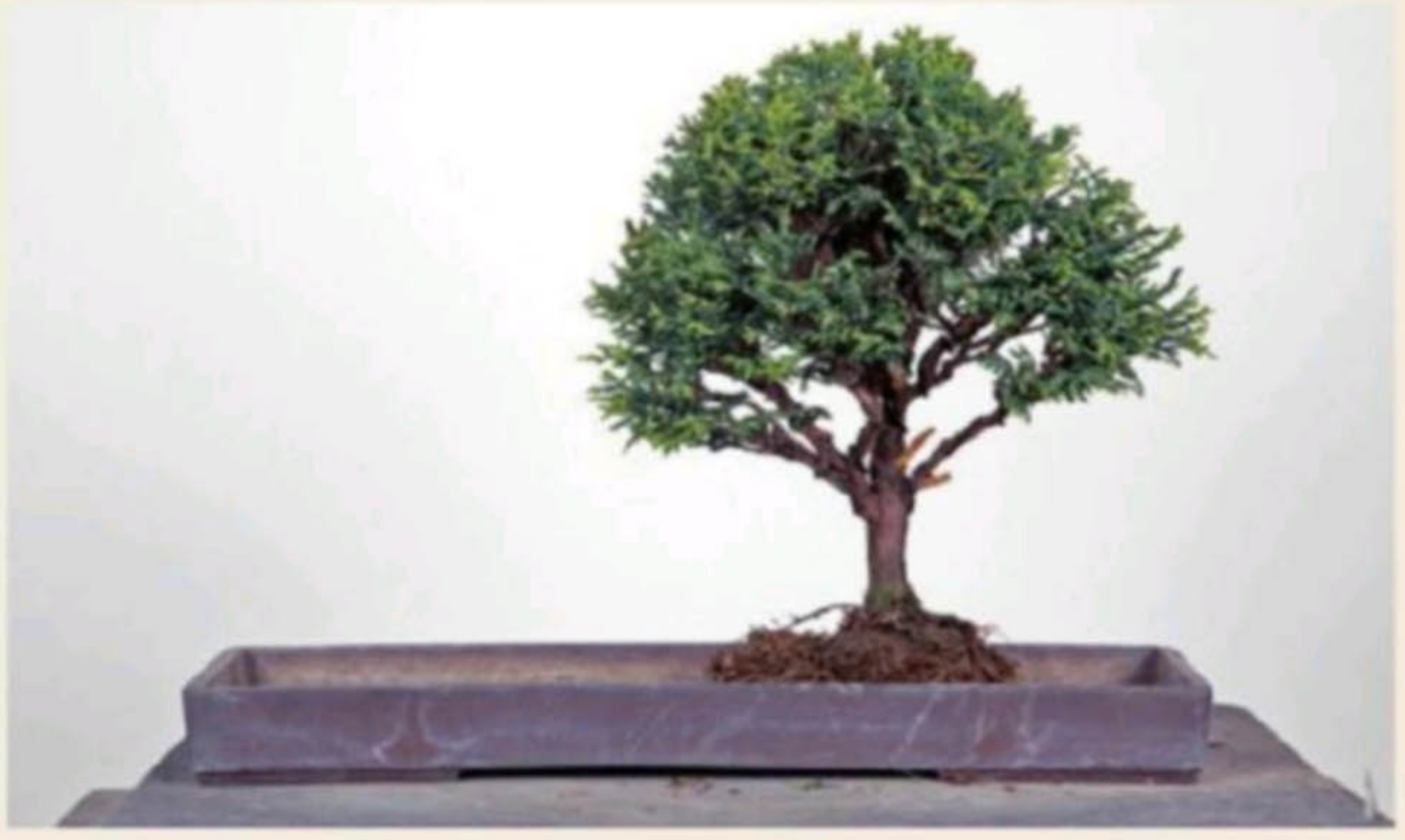

Example B:
A shallower pot with a wider opening compared with A. Shallow pots suit the formal upright style well, so this is a good combination


Example C:
An oval pot with an outward rim. As a pot choice, it's standard and feels natural, but somewhat lacking in character


Example D:
A rectangular pot with an outward rim. This pairing gives a solid, dignified feel typical of conifer bonsai. Not bad, but it appears slightly deep and heavy.

Pot combinations that emphasise open space

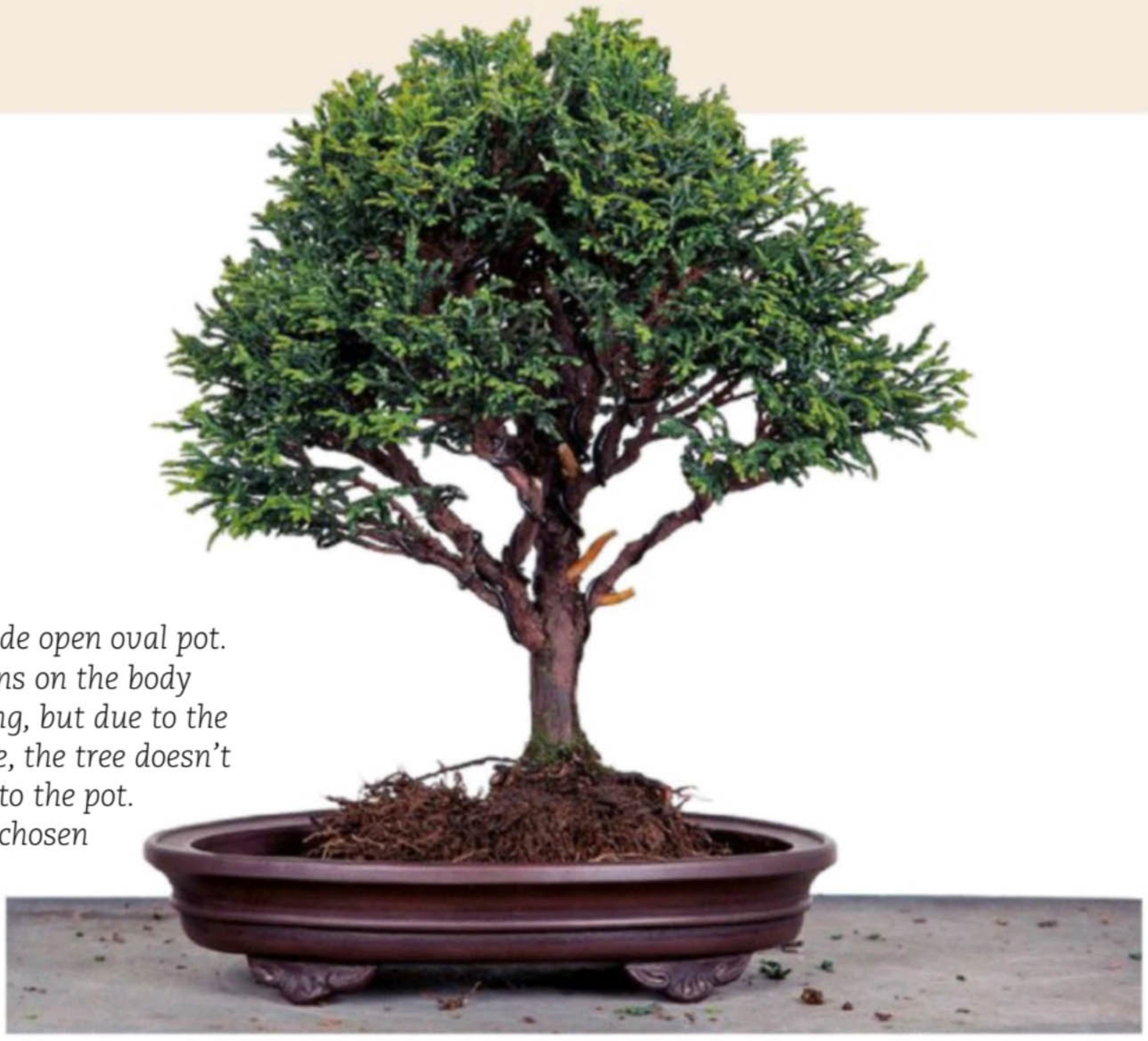

Example E:
An oval pot with an outward rim and wide mouth. It expresses a sense of spacious scenery, but the elaborate rim and cloud feet are too strong, overpowering the tree


Example F:
A combination with a wide-mouthed rectangular tray pot. A very interesting pairing, but like E, the pot is too dominant. If the pot were slightly thinner, it would work

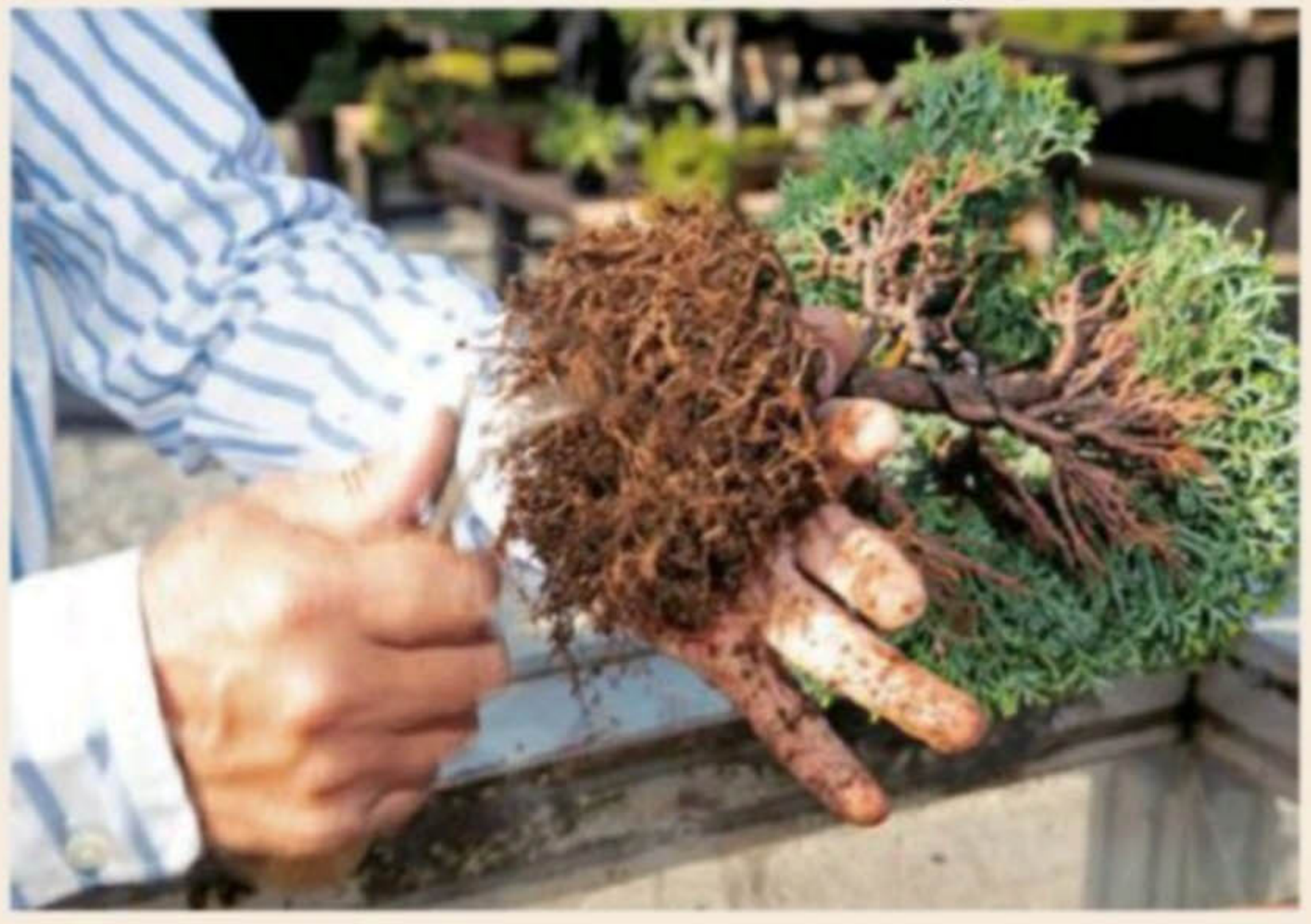
Make it look larger

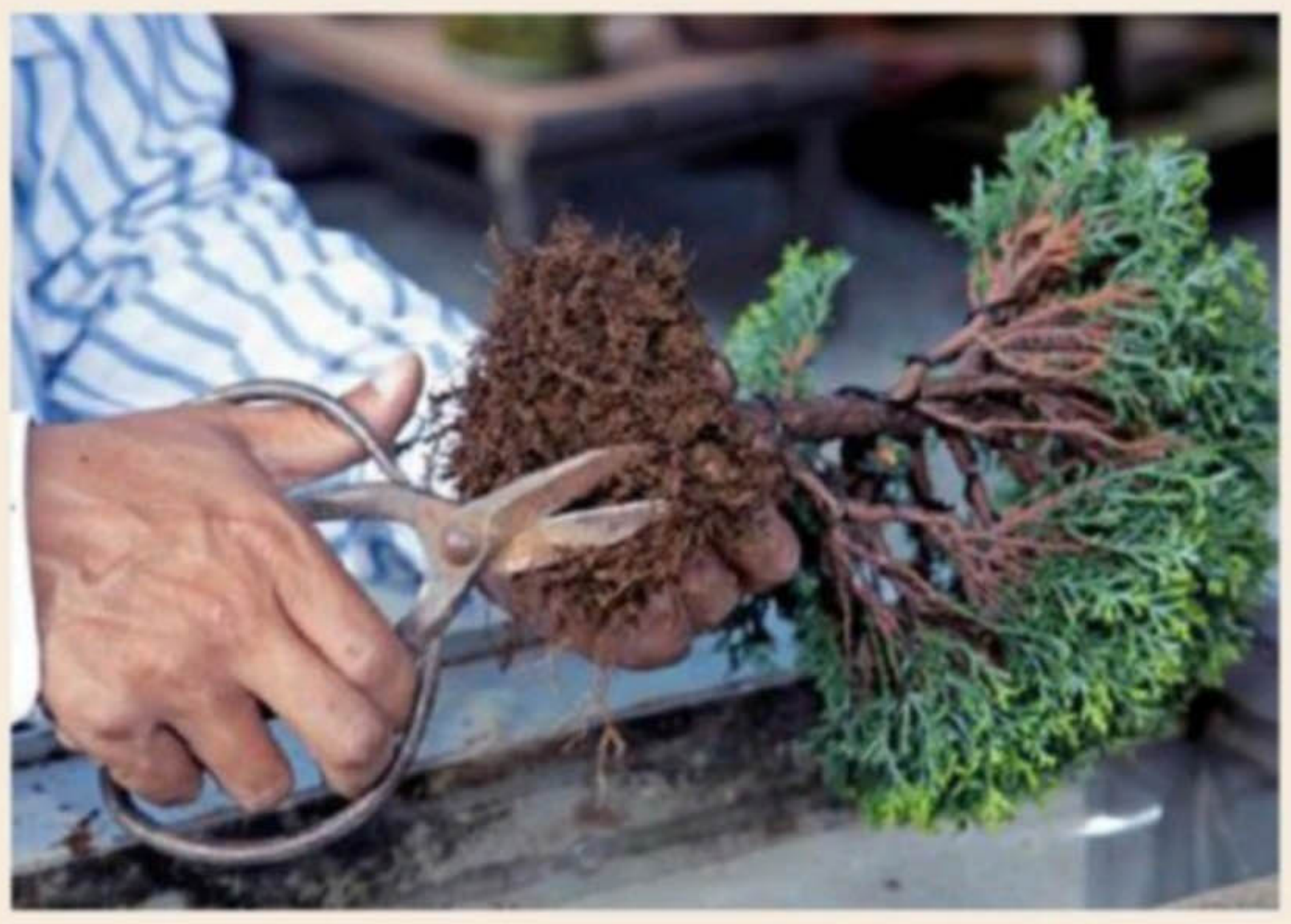
In bonsai pot selection, the basic idea is to choose a pot with a width smaller than the spread of the branches (leaf span). This aims to make the tree appear larger in comparison with a smaller pot — the examples A to D follow this principle.

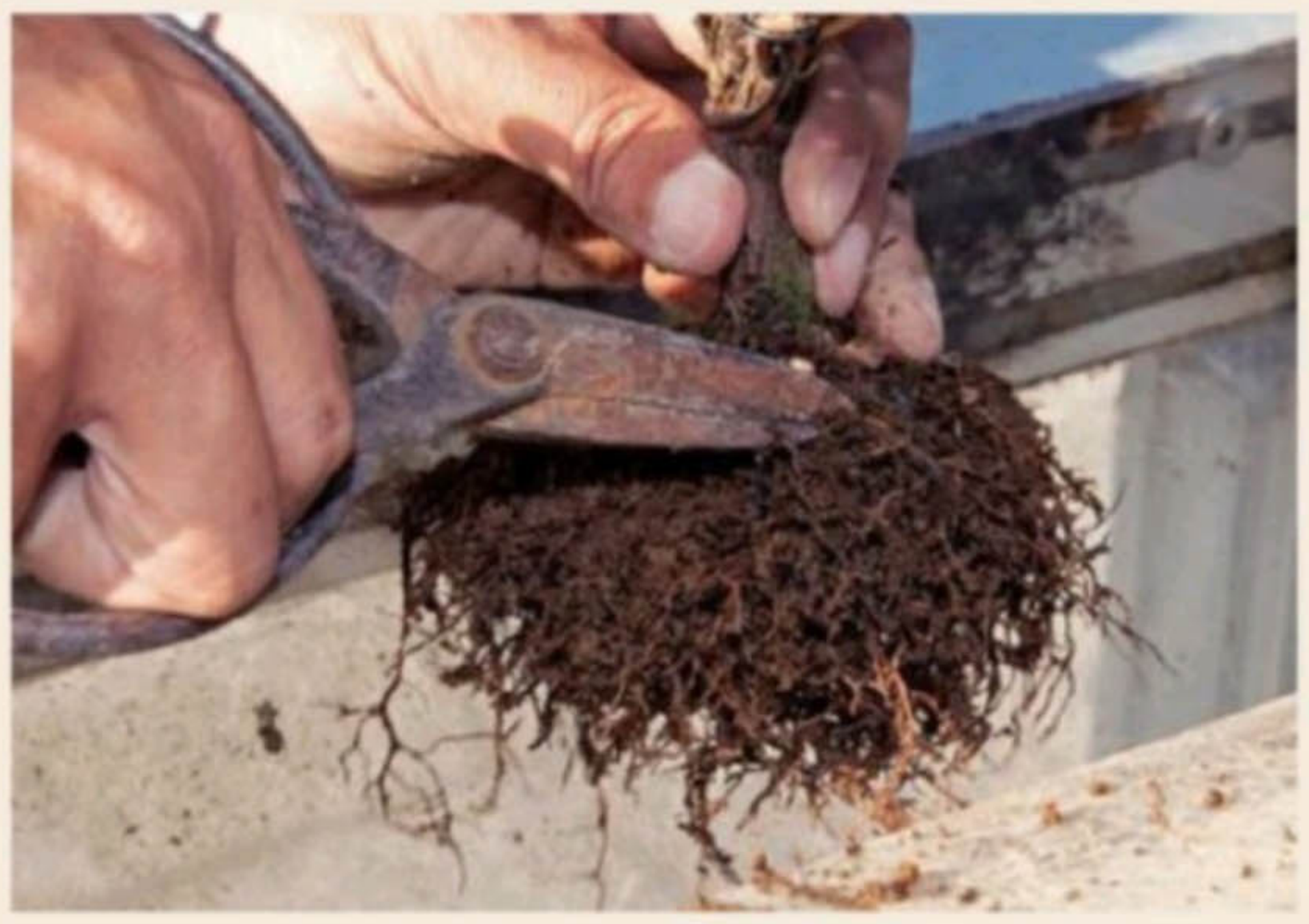
On the other hand, examples E to G feature pots that are wider than the leaf span, moving away from basic guidelines. However, there's also a style where a deliberately wide pot is used to express a grand landscape. This type of pairing is common in group plantings, clump styles, and also with formal upright styles like this one. In such cases, the tree is often planted off-centre to create deliberate open space.

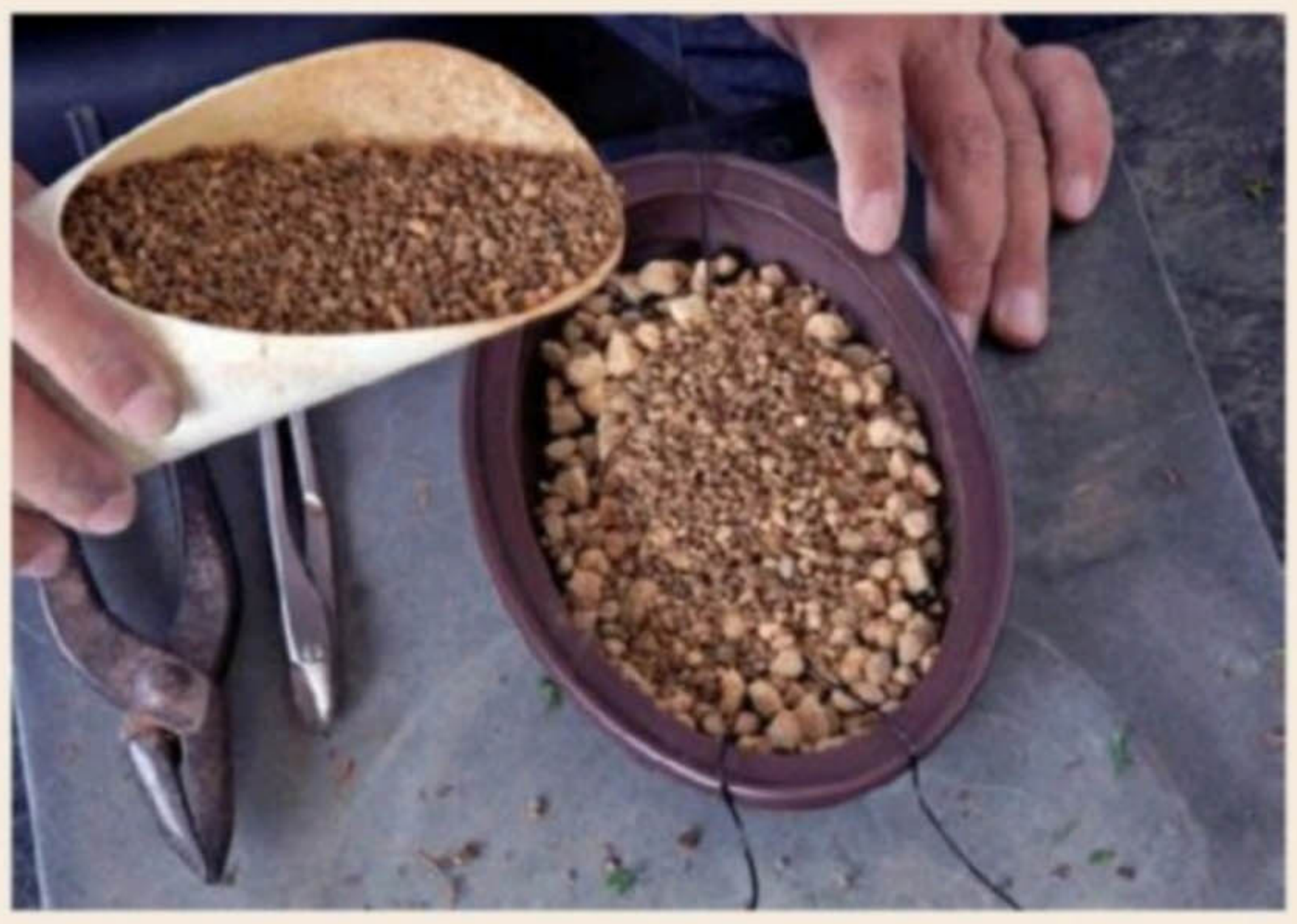

Example G:
A shallow, wide open oval pot. The decorations on the body are a bit strong, but due to the shallow shape, the tree doesn't lose presence to the pot. This pot was chosen for the tree

Root work and repotting process

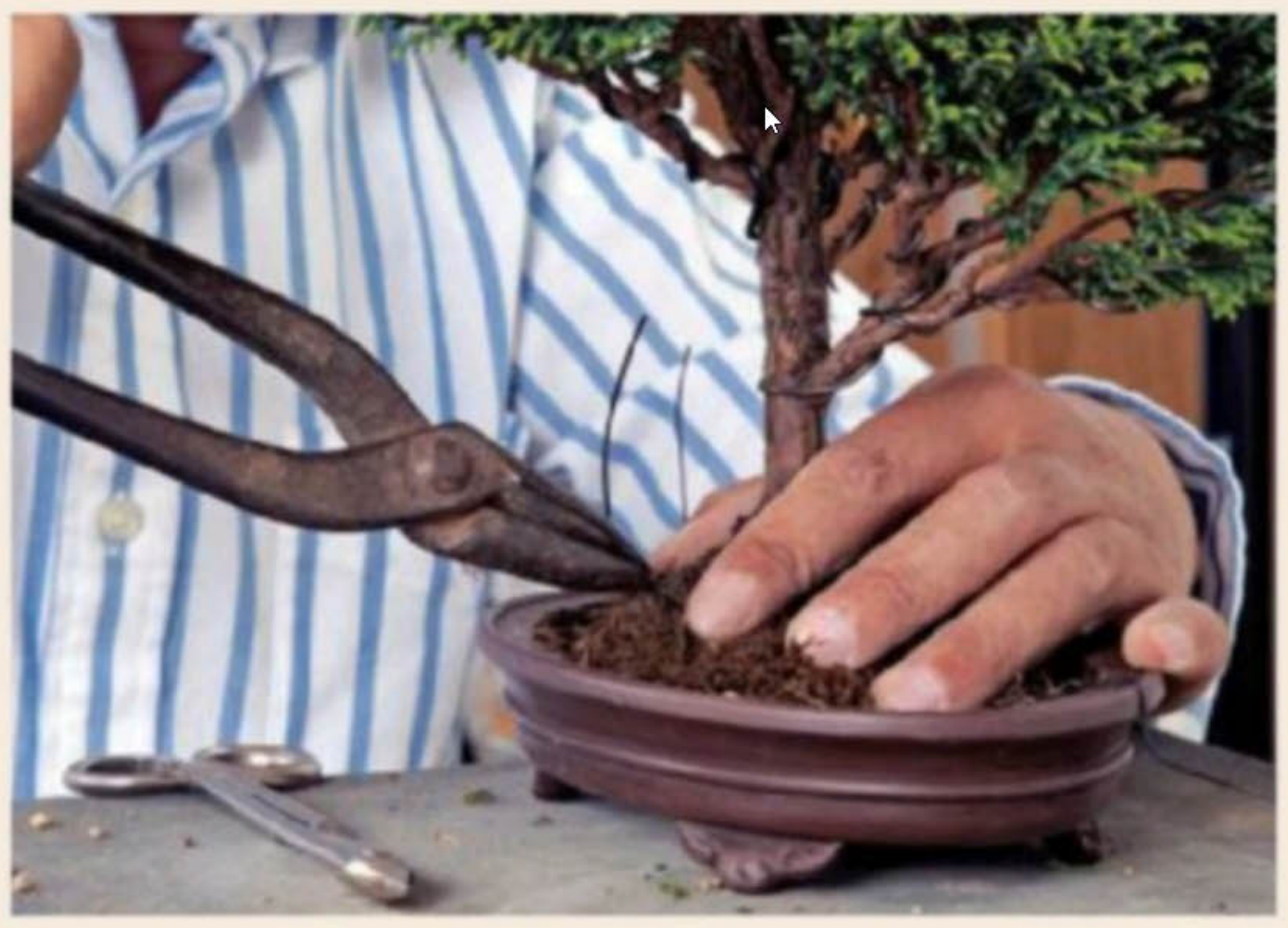

After removing the tree from the pot, the bottom of the root ball is broken down But be careful not to damage the long roots while loosening the base soil


Once the bottom soil is broken up, continue loosening the side and top soil, then cut off the long roots that had extended downward. Leave about one-third of the root ball intact

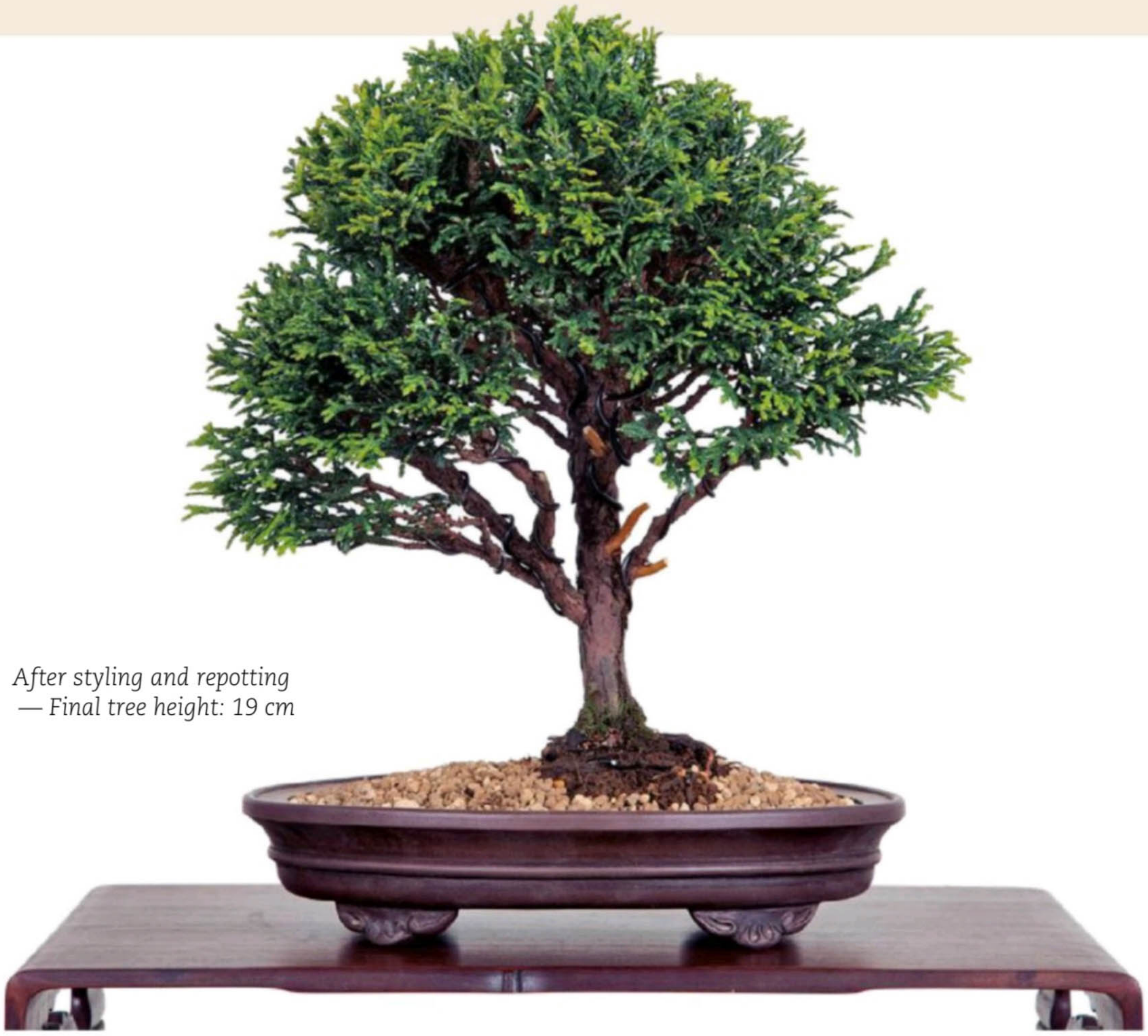

Identify thick surface roots. To create a well-balanced root spread, prune back to a point where there are viable fine roots that can take over


Even in a shallow pot, always add larger particle soil at the bottom for drainage. Then place fine planting soil on top of that

Carefully check the front view and height of the tree. Since the pot has a relatively wide mouth, the plan is to plant the tree slightly off-centre to the right


Once the planting position is decided, secure the tree in place. Tighten the wire that was threaded through the drainage holes beforehand to hold the tree firmly so it won't move

From its previously overgrown and dense state, unnecessary branches were thinned out, especially around the bases of branches. The tree was then transformed into a clean outline with the crown and foliage pads clearly defined. This not only eliminated its formerly flat impression by making the trunk lines and branch movement more visible, but it brought out the impression of an old, stately tree with success. If this branch structure can be maintained, it may be ready for exhibition within the next two to three years.


After styling and repotting
— Final tree height: 19 cm

Malus 'Zumi'

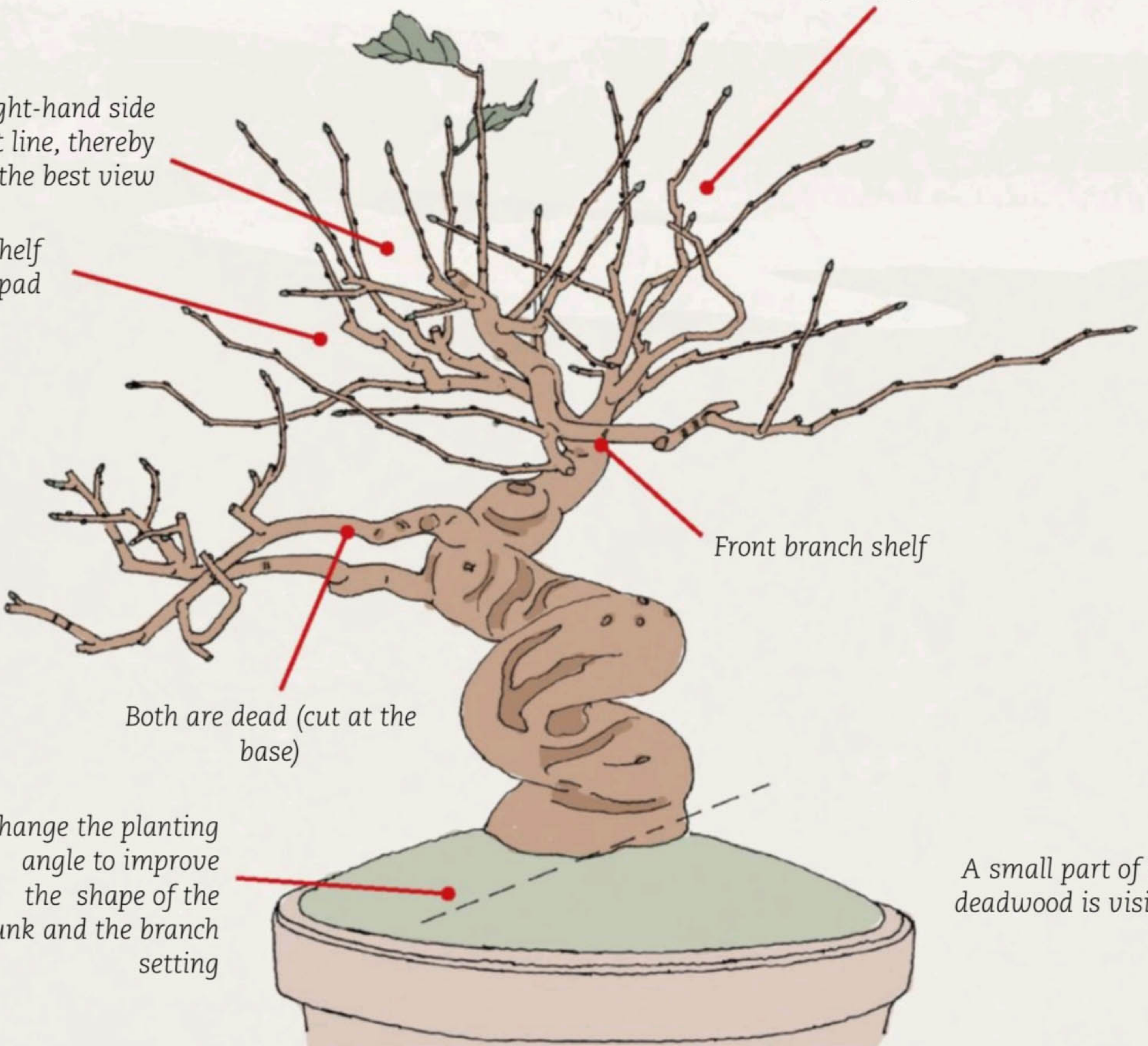
Text and photography: Kinbon, Japan Illustrations: Kyosuke Gun

How to create bonsai from cuttings, grafting and other methods using interesting and unusual species. Helped by Kyosuke Gun's illustrations we give you easy-to-understand explanations. Let's see how to take the material through to its completion. This time we are working with a seedling of Malus 'zumi'

Young plants are relatively inexpensive to obtain, but it is not easy to grow them into something that one can really appreciate. Kyosuke's illustrations clearly explain everything from the initial training right after obtaining the plant, to creating branches; he also gives tips on encouraging the plant to bloom and produce flowers and fruit.

Trim the messy branches and restore the outline of the moyogi

Mid-October



The trunk and a right-hand side branch form a straight line, thereby blocking the best view

Back branch shelf or foliage pad

This tree was acquired several years ago and has a twisted trunk that has now fattened. Several of the lower branches have died, and the long branches that grew the previous year are stretching out in all directions

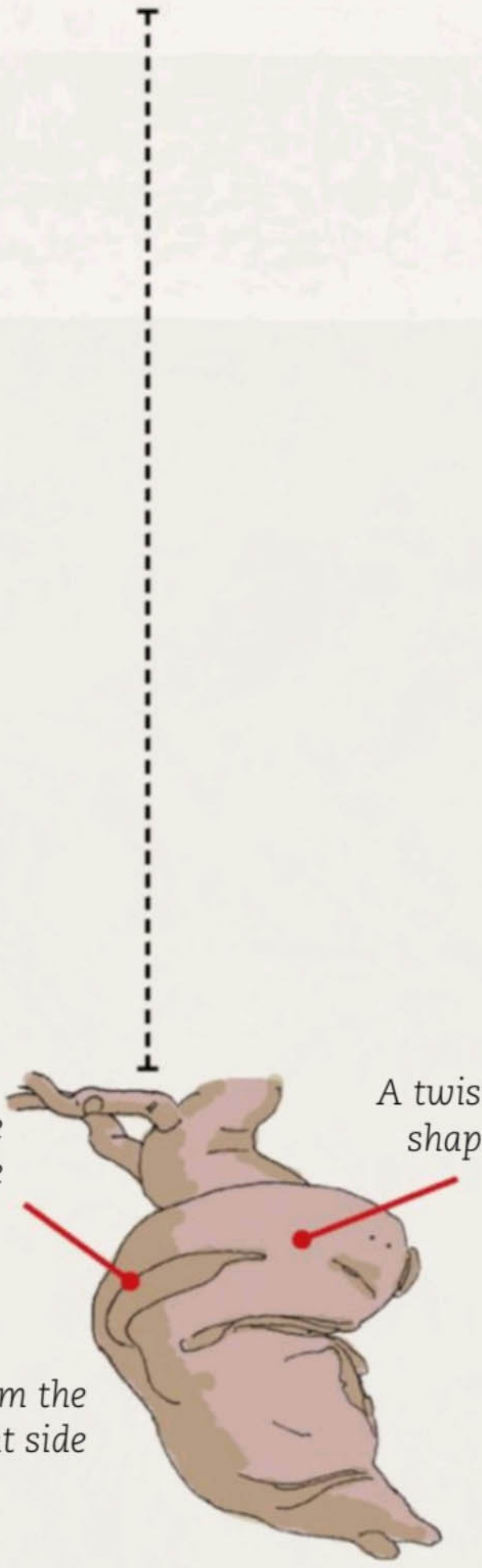
Right branch shelf or foliage pad

Front branch shelf

Both are dead (cut at the base)

Change the planting angle to improve the shape of the trunk and the branch setting

12 cm diameter pot



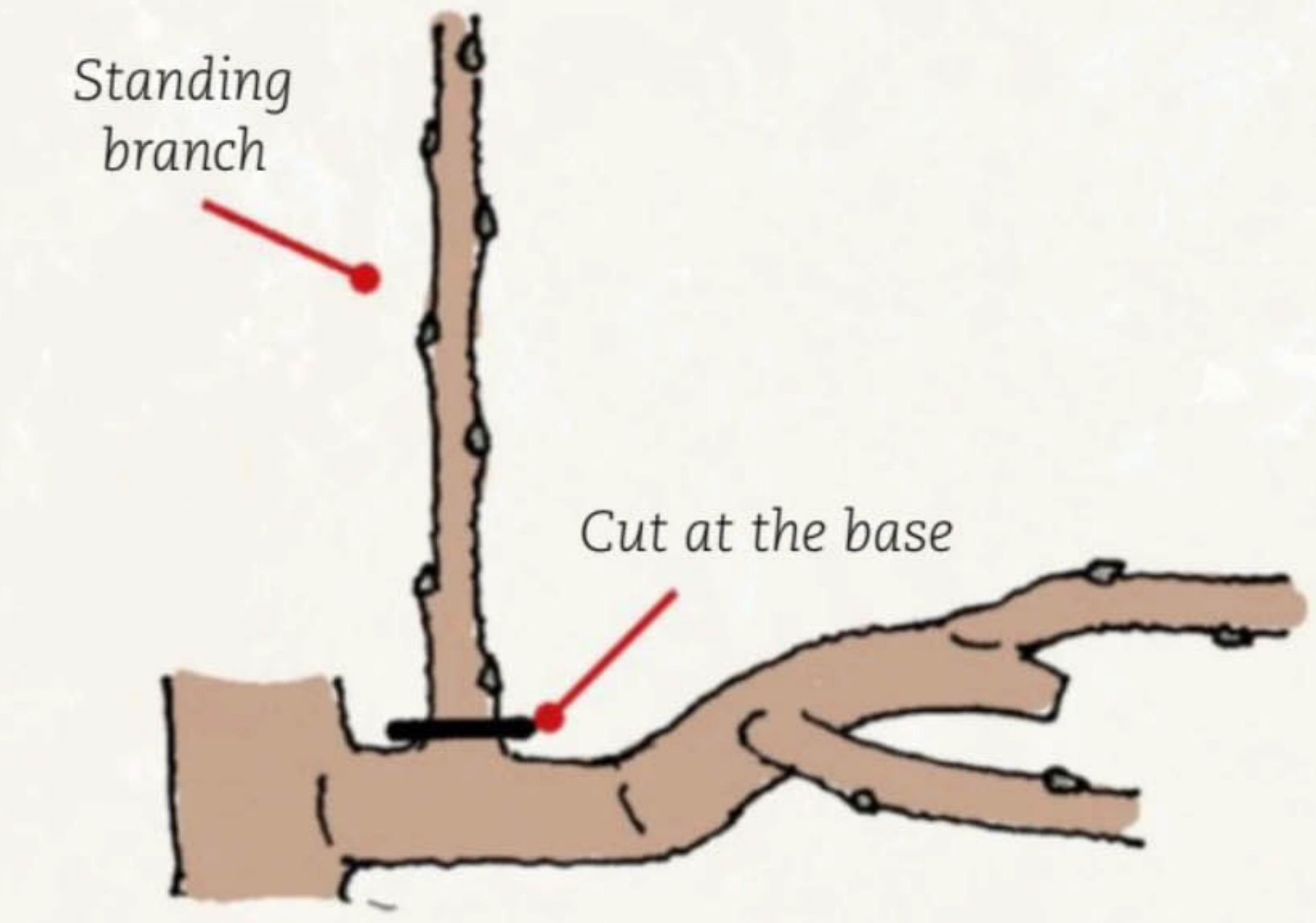
20 cm to the base

A small part of the deadwood is visible

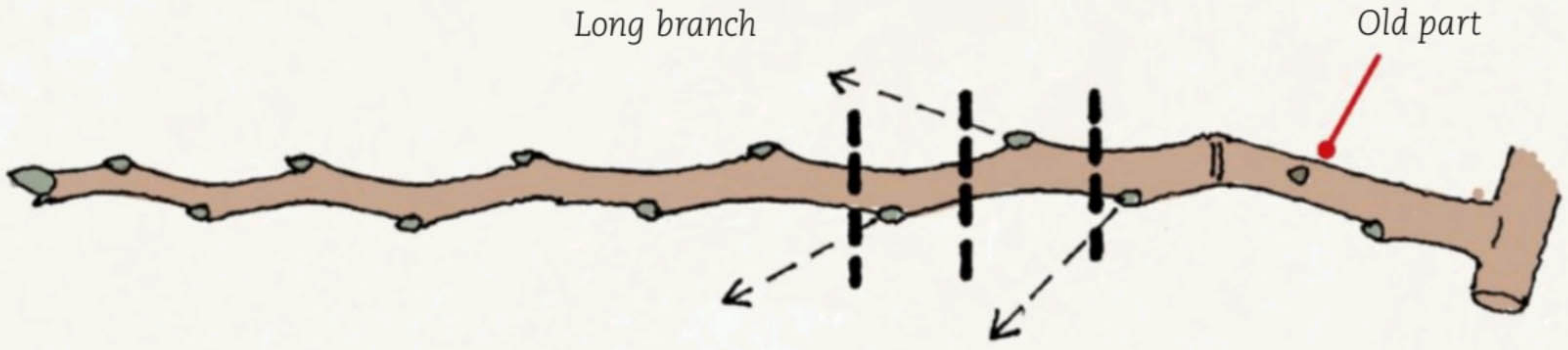
A twisted shape

Trunk seen from the right side

Pruning upward-growing branches

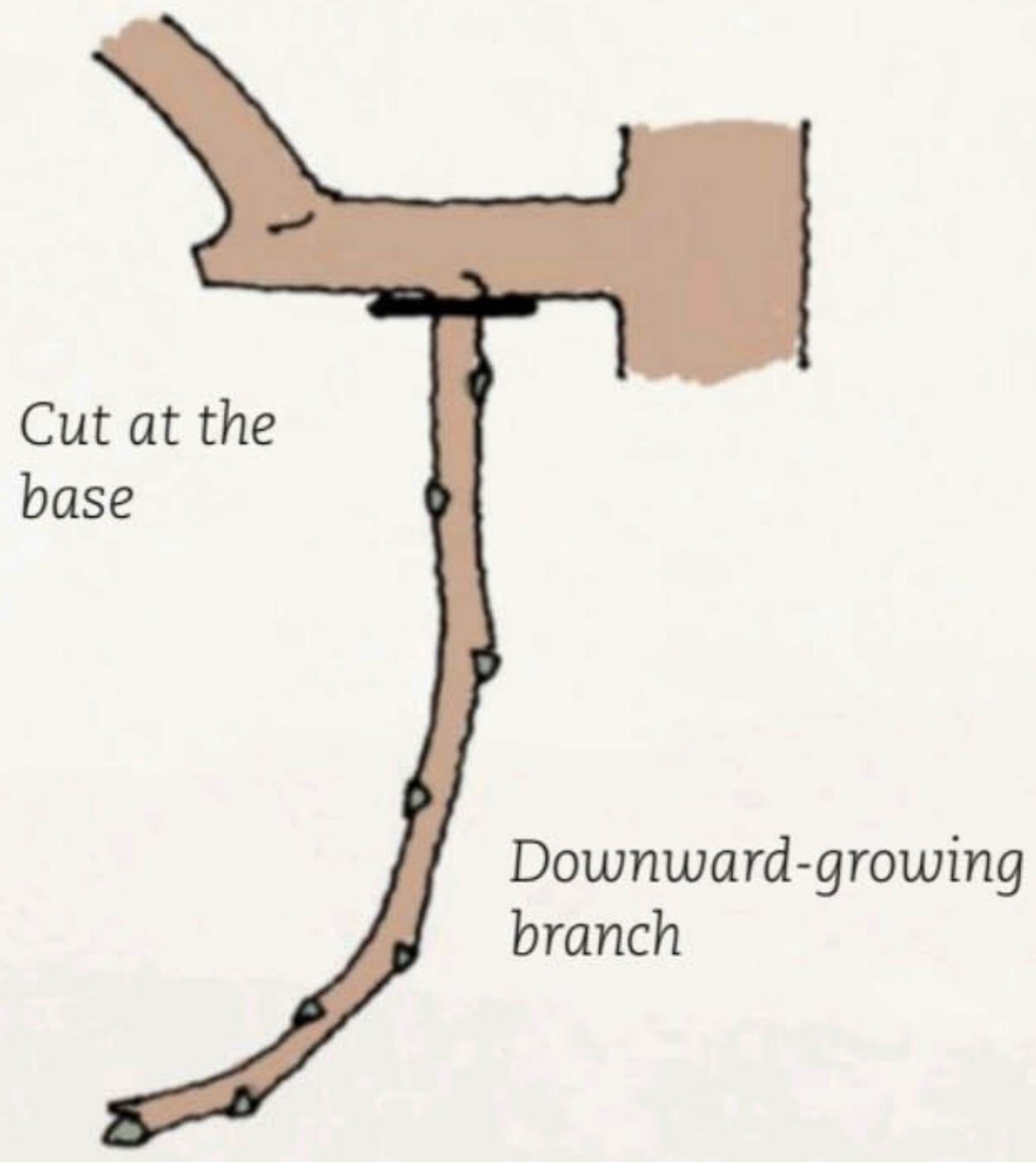


Pruning overgrown shoots

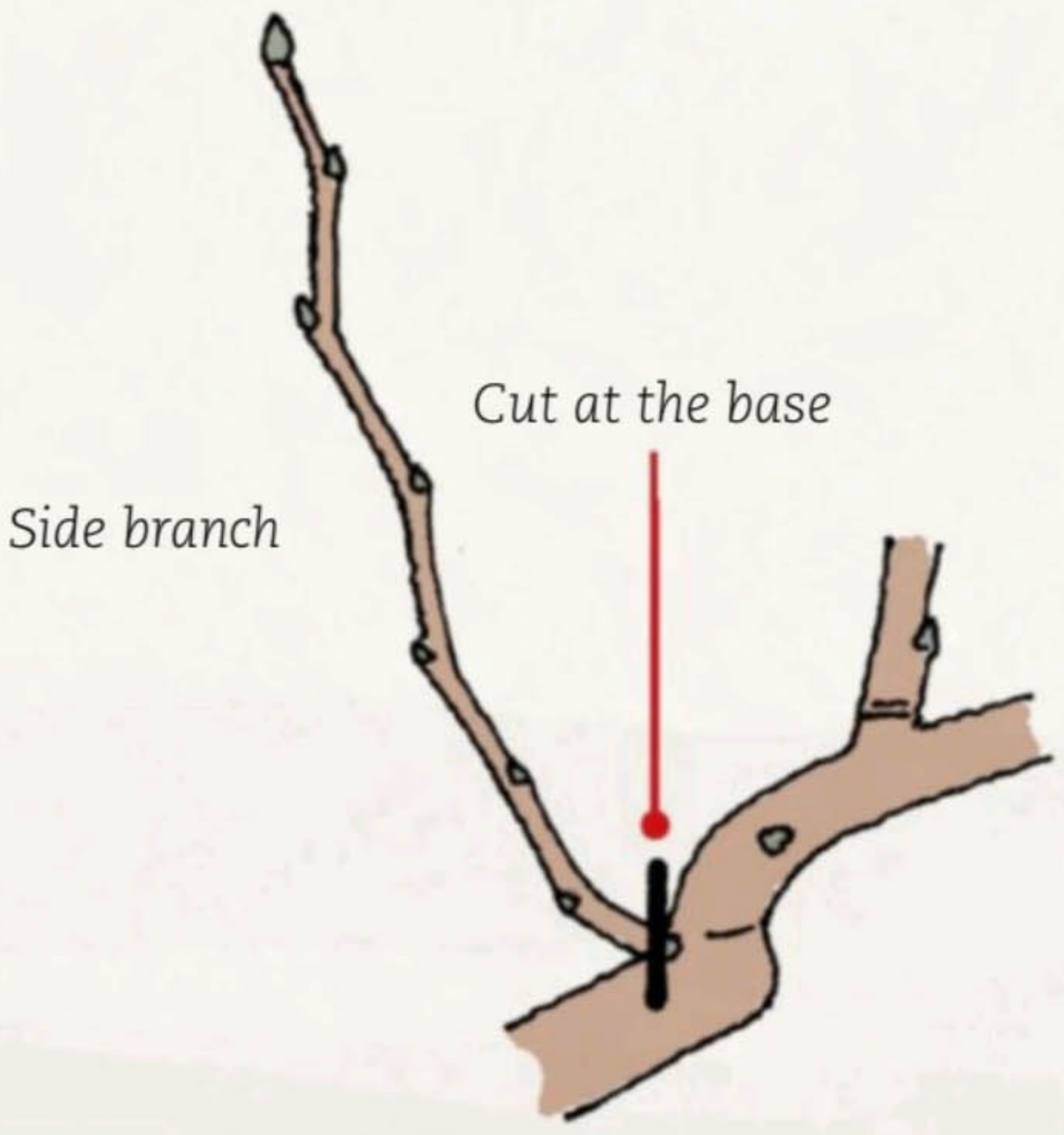


Prune back to 1 - 3 buds, leaving them in the direction you want the tree to grow

Pruning both the down- and upward-growing branches



Pruning side branches



'Zumi' as bonsai

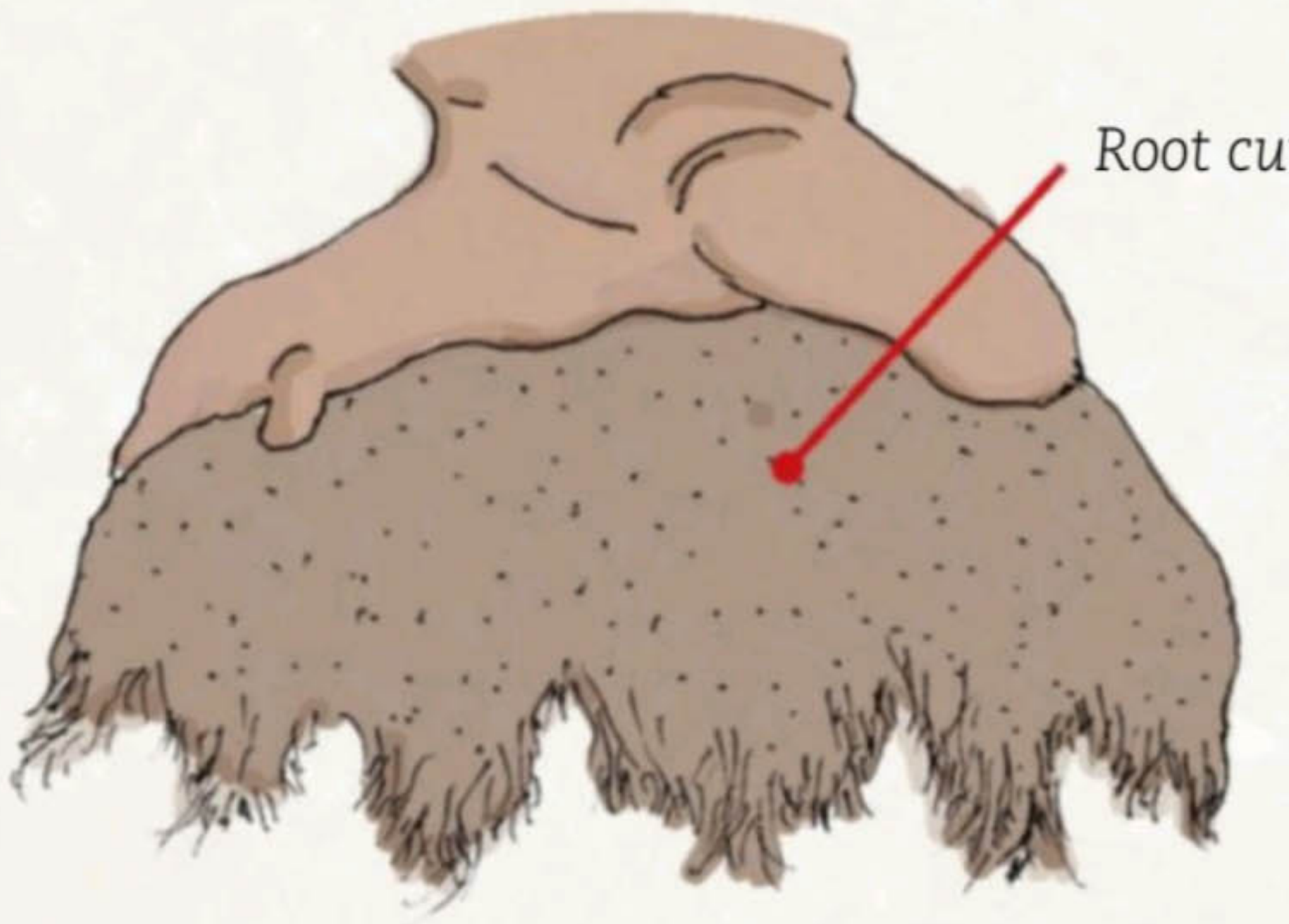
This deciduous shrub, a member of the apple genus (*Malus*) in the rose family (Rosaceae), is widespread across Japan, from Hokkaido to Kyushu. *Miyama Kaido* (deep mountain crab-apple) is botanically identical to 'Zumi'. It refers specifically to the red-fruited variety; the yellow-fruit variety is classified as Kimizumi, though bonsai enthusiasts typically use 'Zumi' for the yellow-fruit variety, reserving the *Miyama Kaido* as an umbrella term that encompasses both red and yellow-fruited types.

Only yellow-fruited varieties are called 'Zumi' in the bonsai world, likely due to their long-standing high value. This is because, besides their beautiful fruit, they last far longer. Red-fruited varieties drop around December, but yellow 'Zumi' can persist until February with proper care. Their ability to last until the Kokufu-ten, a major bonsai exhibition, has made them highly prized as specimen bonsai. Flower buds form at the ends of short branches, developing into new shoots in spring, each bearing clusters of several small white flowers.

Cultivate and care for this plant like you would a regular *Malus*. Its roots grow quickly, so if you wait too long between repotting, they'll become overcrowded, weakening the plant. Repot every spring or autumn, aiming for once a year. This plant needs plenty of water; never let it dry out, especially while it's flowering or fruiting.

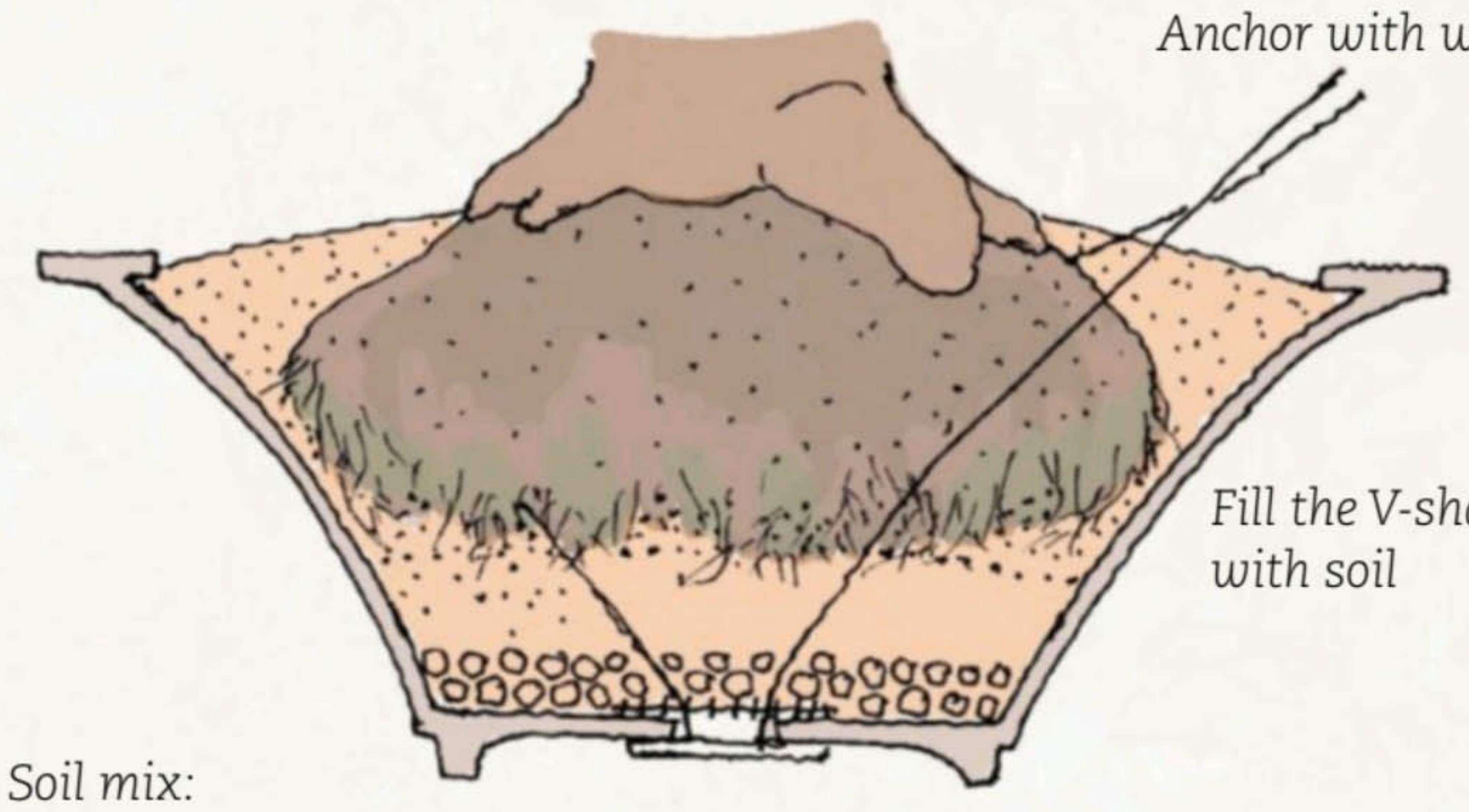
Key to apple tree fruit production is encouraging the growth of many short branches. Long, fast-growing branches don't produce flowers; the flower buds develop only on shorter, slower-growing branches. For better flowering, prune the new shoots to four leaves in mid-May to early June while they're still soft. This stops excessive growth. The new buds that grow from the remaining leaves will be compact, promoting formation of flower buds. To thicken the base of young tree branches during their formative stage, allow new shoots to grow. These will be shortened later, but ensure a distinct pattern is established at the base. June, when new shoots are pliable, is ideal for wiring. Repeatedly growing and pruning encourages branching, leading to more short, stubby branches and a higher chance of flower buds.

How to cut the roots


Root cutting

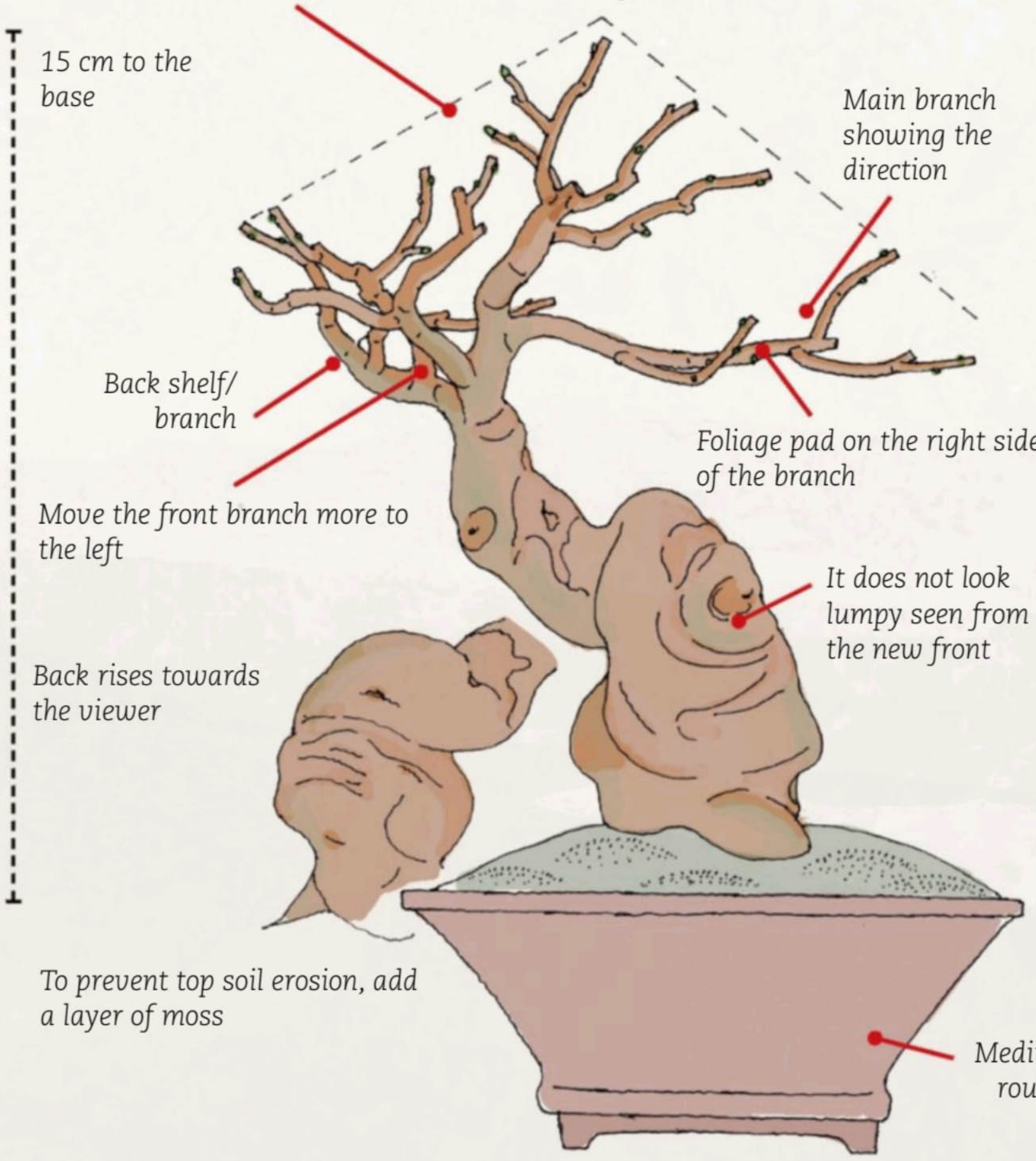
The hardened old soil is cut with V-shape cuts and replenished with new soil

How to plant

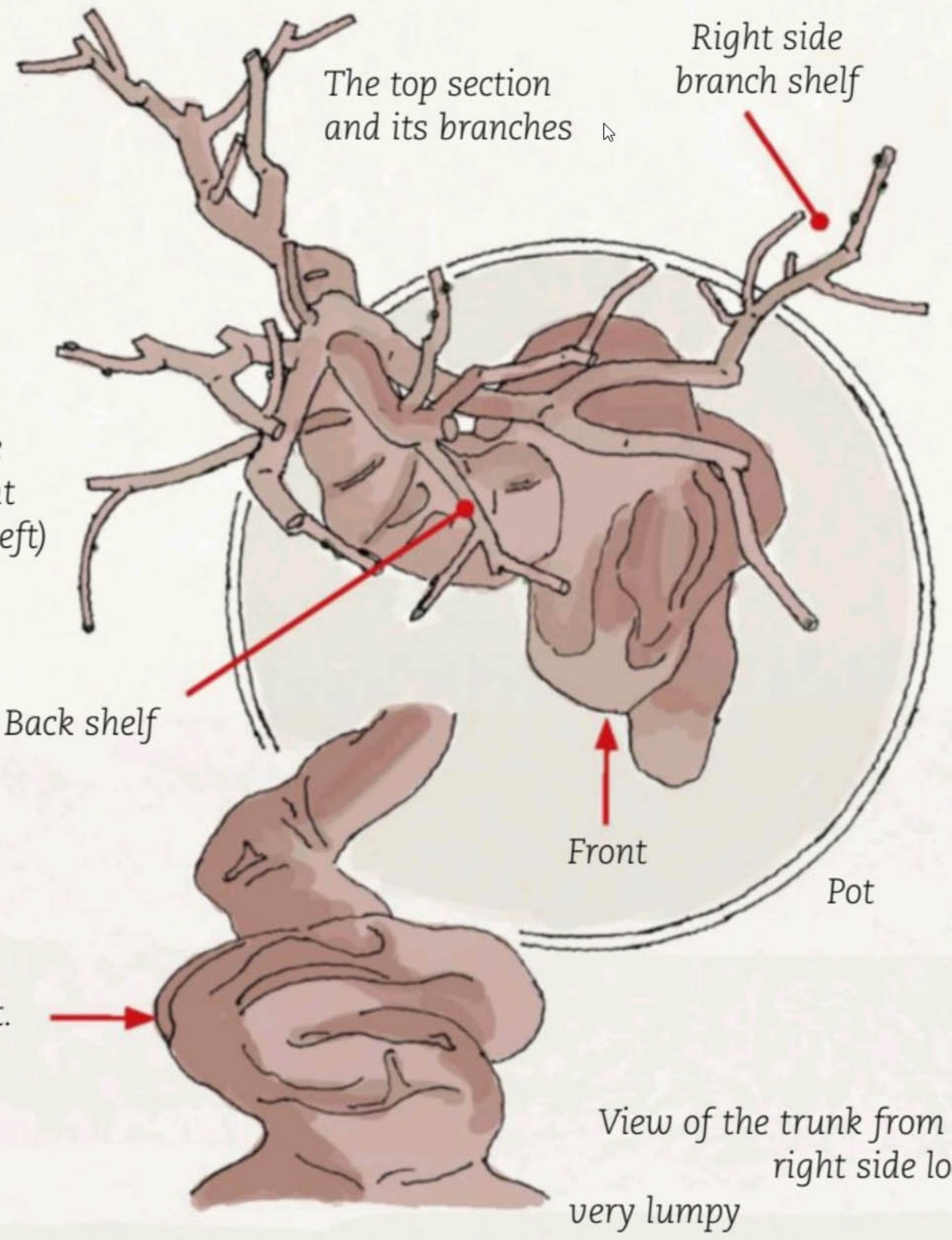

Anchor with wire
Fill the V-shaped trench with soil

Soil mix:
80% Akadama
A mixture of 20% Kiryu sand and
0.5% kun-tan (smoked charcoal)

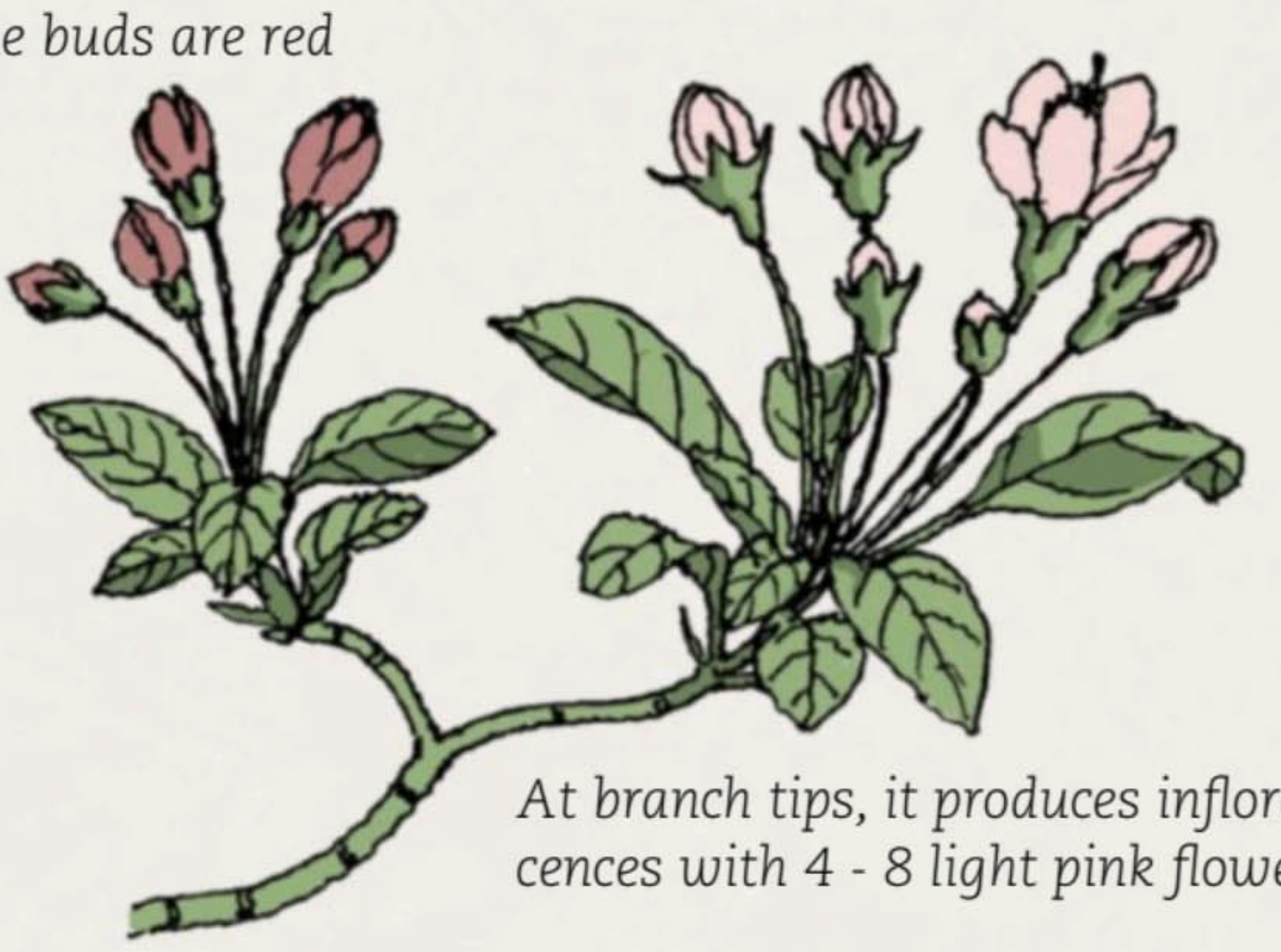
After repotting

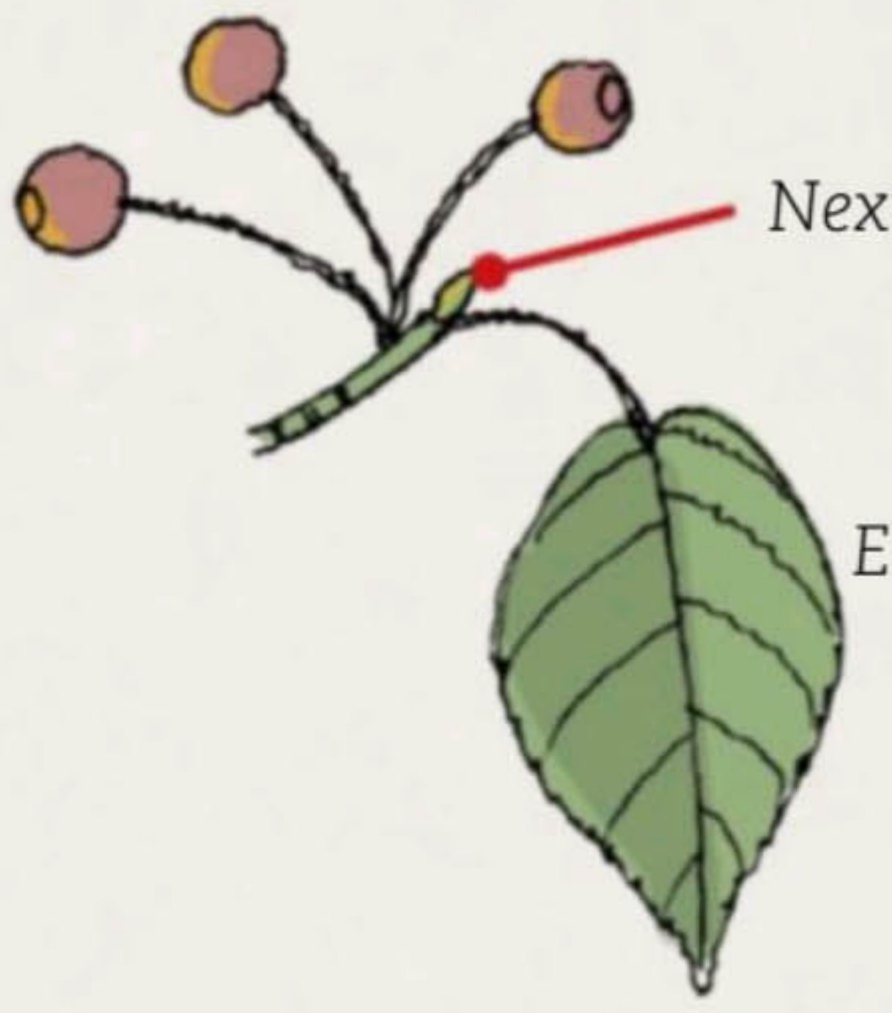

Prune to an approximate scalene triangle shape.
Top
15 cm to the base
Main branch showing the direction
Back shelf/ branch
Foliage pad on the right side of the branch
Move the front branch more to the left
It does not look lumpy seen from the new front
Back rises towards the viewer
To prevent top soil erosion, add a layer of moss
Medium deep round pot

A bird's-eye view of the branch layout

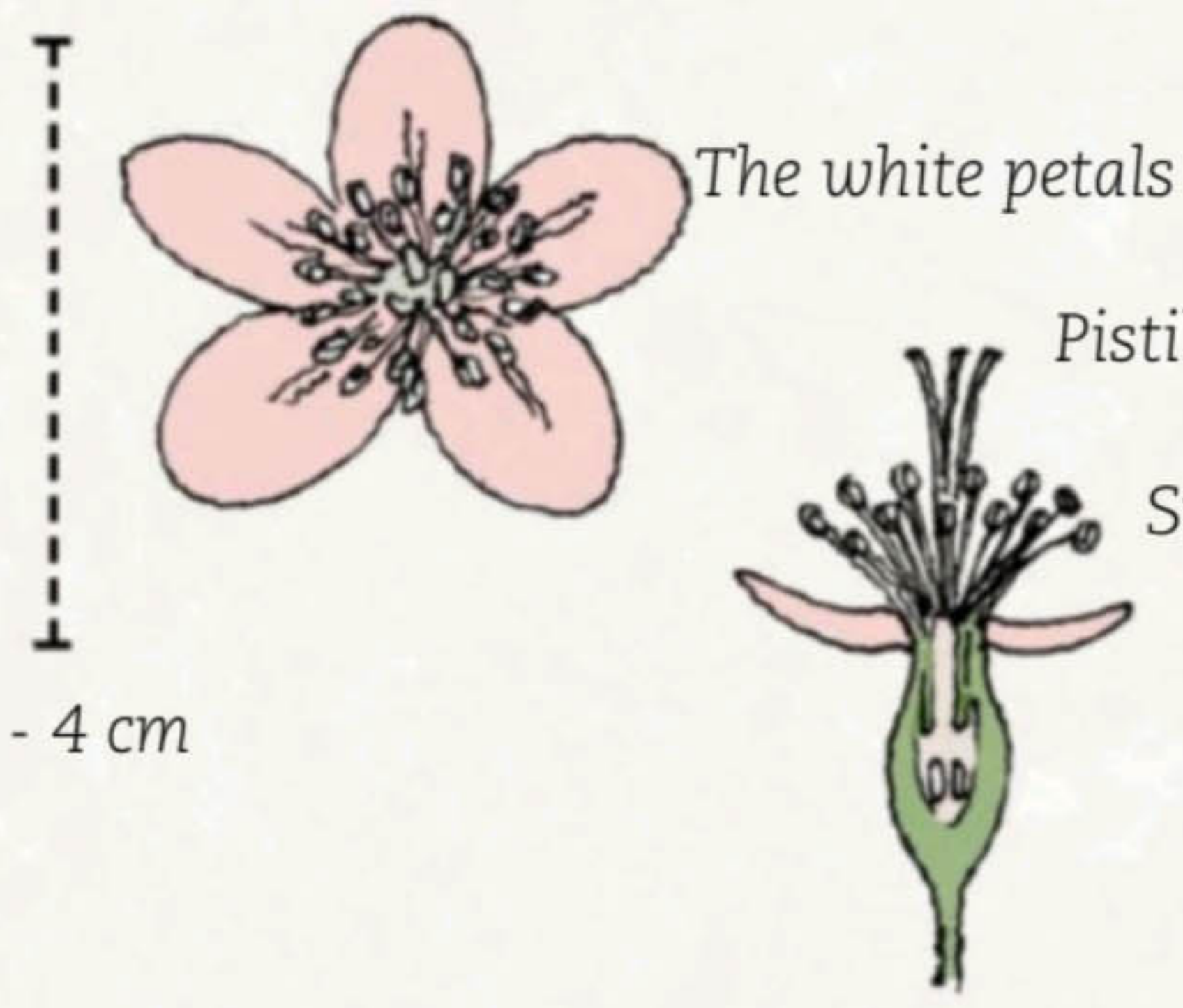

The top section and its branches
Right side branch shelf
Branch shelf on the left side (move the front branch to the left)
Back shelf
Front
Pot
Front.
View of the trunk from the right side looks very lumpy

Blooming period: April - May


The buds are red
At branch tips, it produces inflorescences with 4 - 8 light pink flowers


The plant bears small red or yellow fruits, about 1 cm in size
Next year's flower buds
Elliptical leaves
The leaves are three-lobed, with some mixed in

Cross section

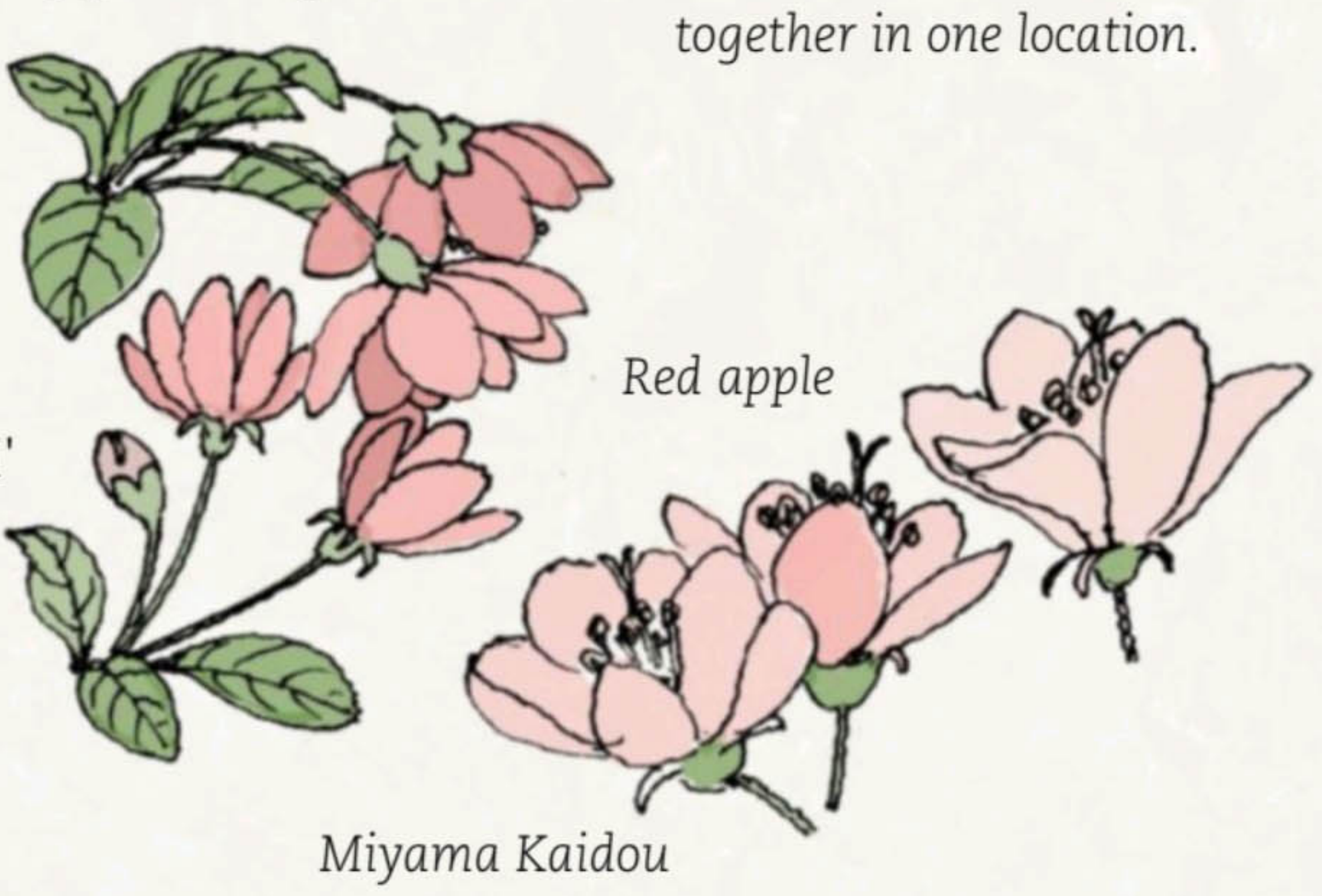


The white petals are round

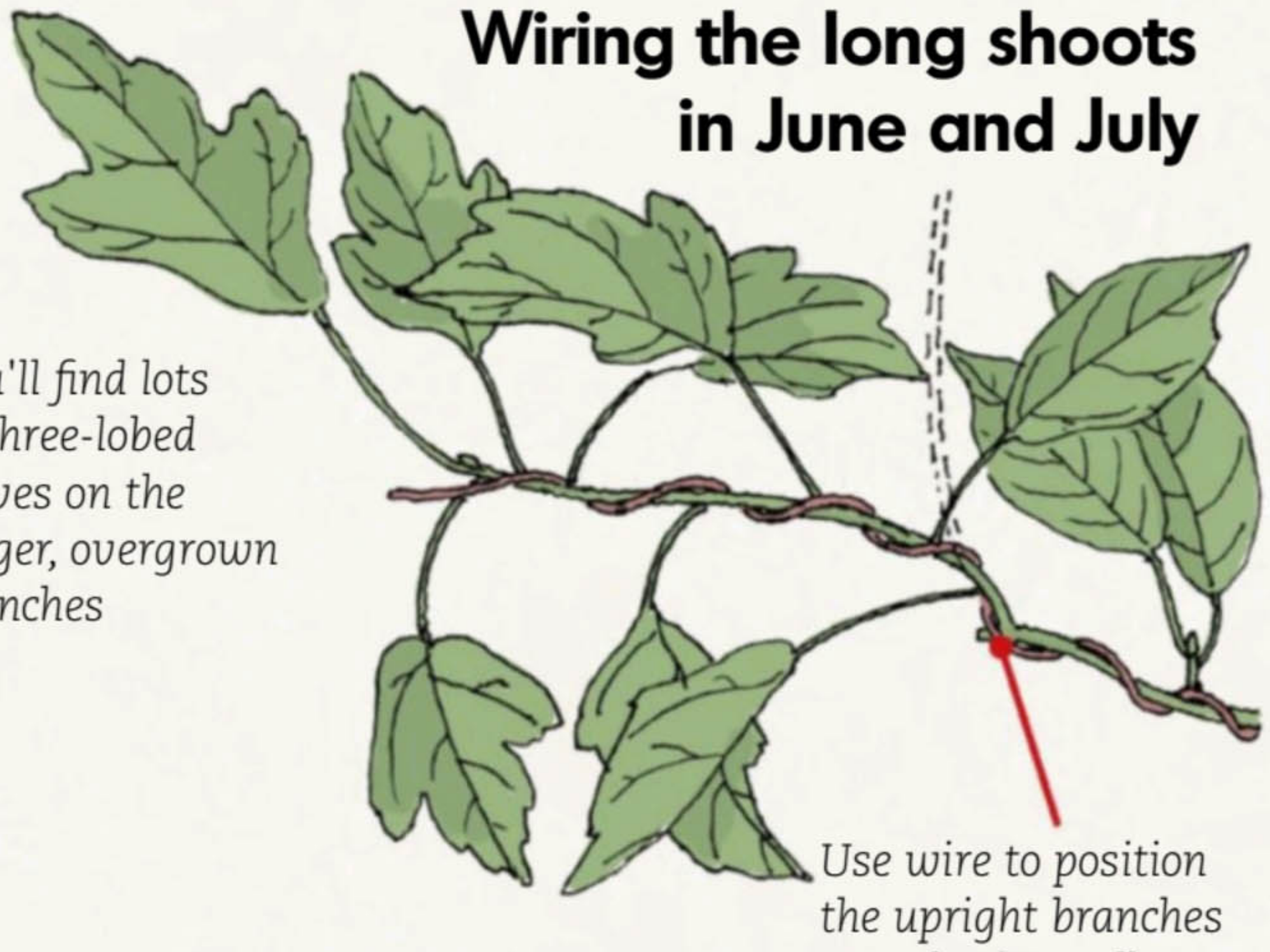
Crossbreeding

When blossoming give enough water

Group trees of the same species, or those that bloom at the same time, together in one location.



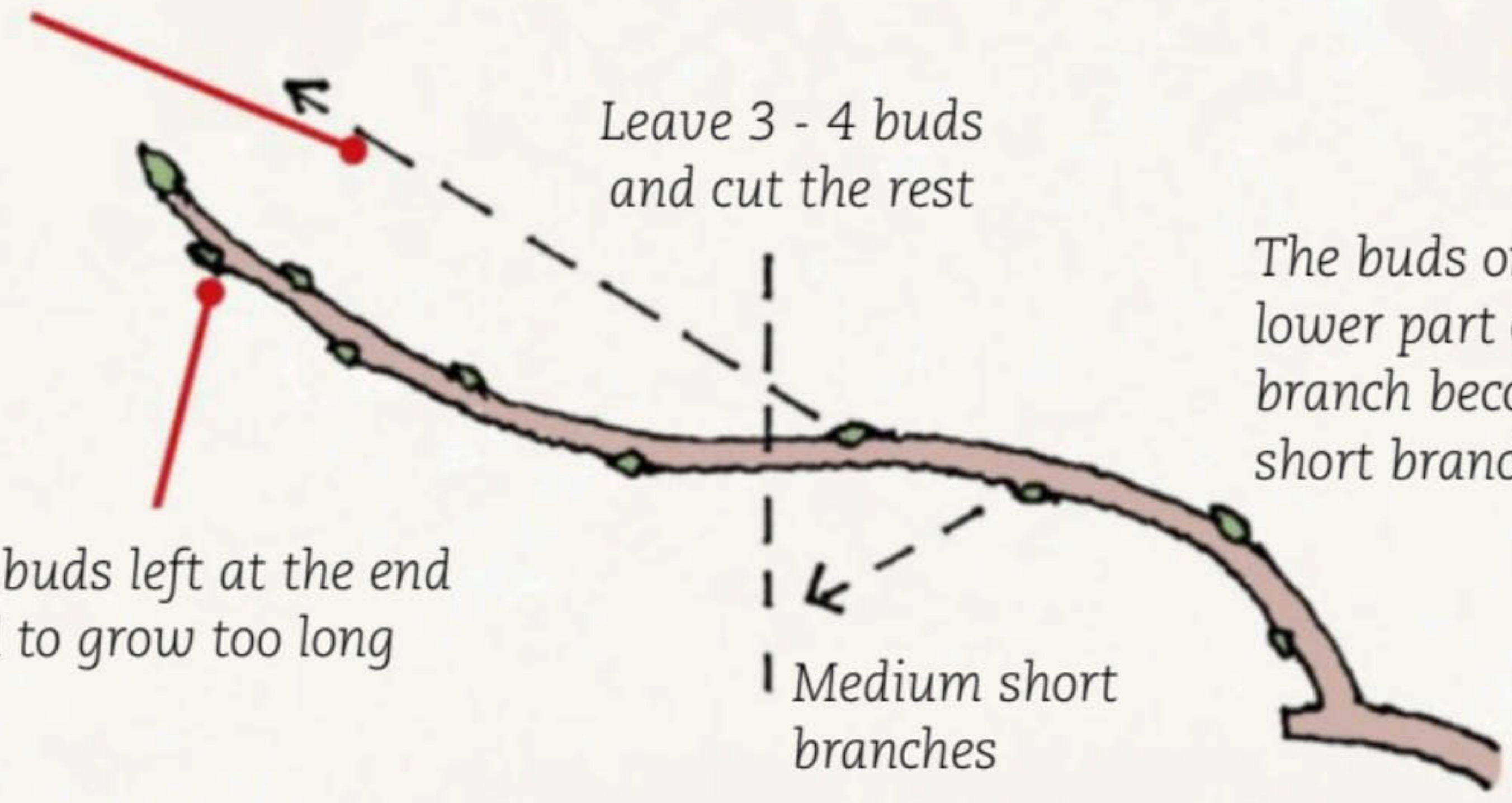
Wiring the long shoots in June and July



You'll find lots of three-lobed leaves on the longer, overgrown branches

Use wire to position the upright branches more horizontally

Pruning dormant period



Grow into long or short branch

Leave 3 - 4 buds and cut the rest

The buds on the lower part of the branch become short branches

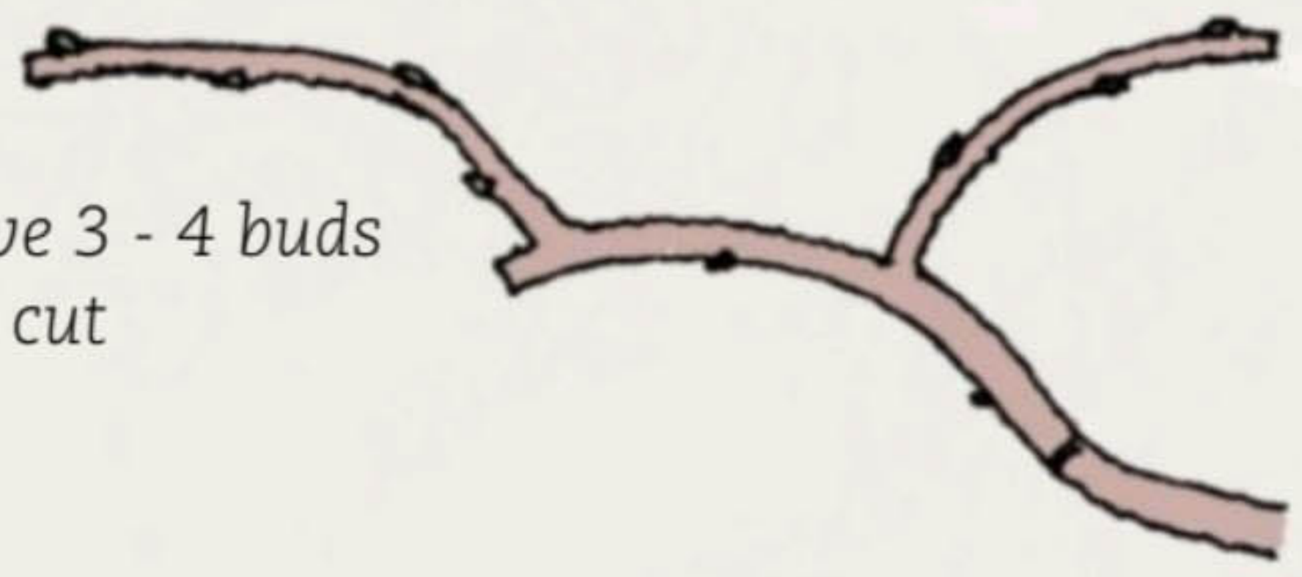
The buds left at the end tend to grow too long

Medium short branches

Tree bearing fruit: October - November

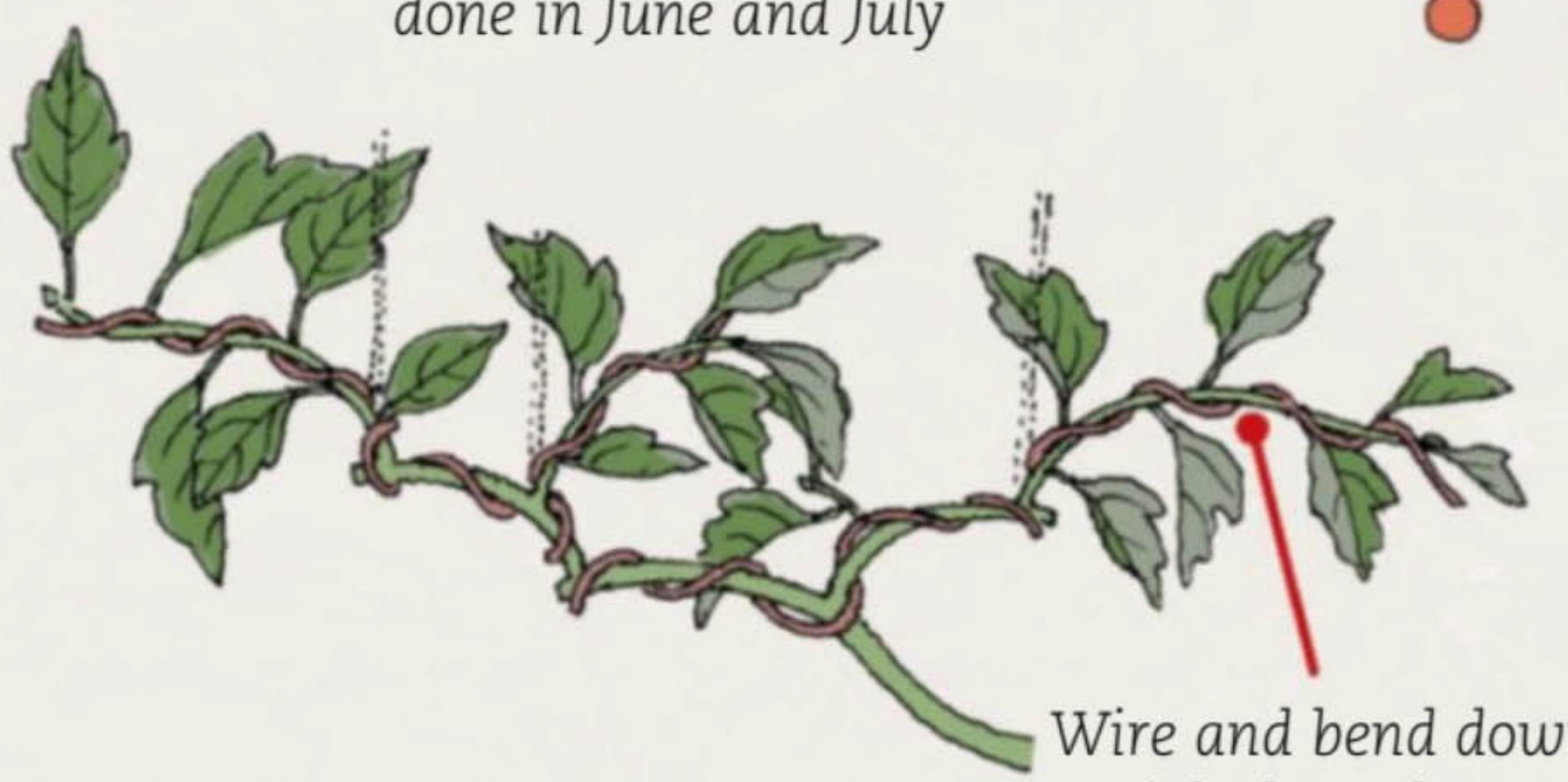
How to make a branch shelf/foliage pad

After pruning overgrown branches. Dormant period

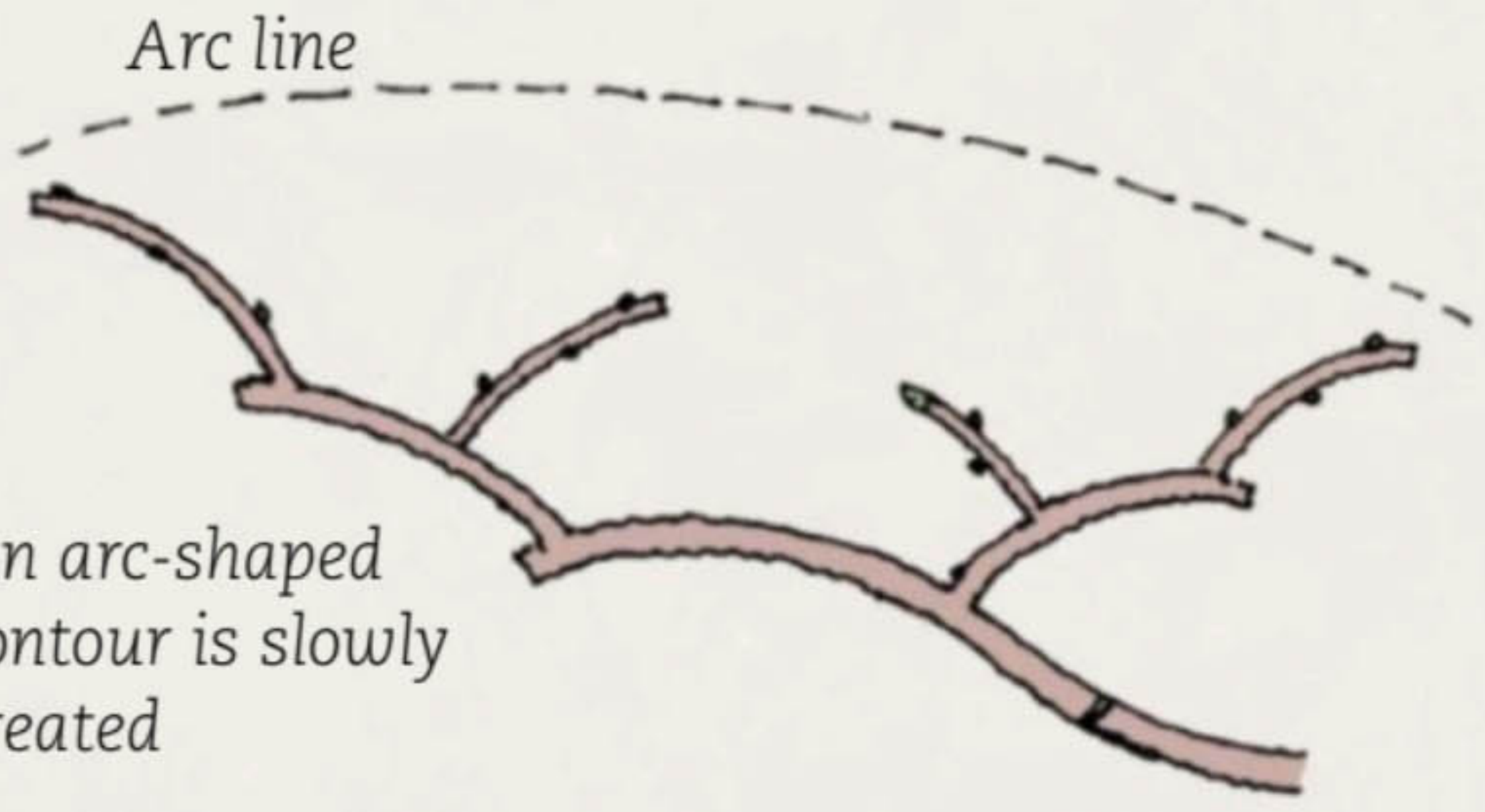


Leave 3 - 4 buds and cut

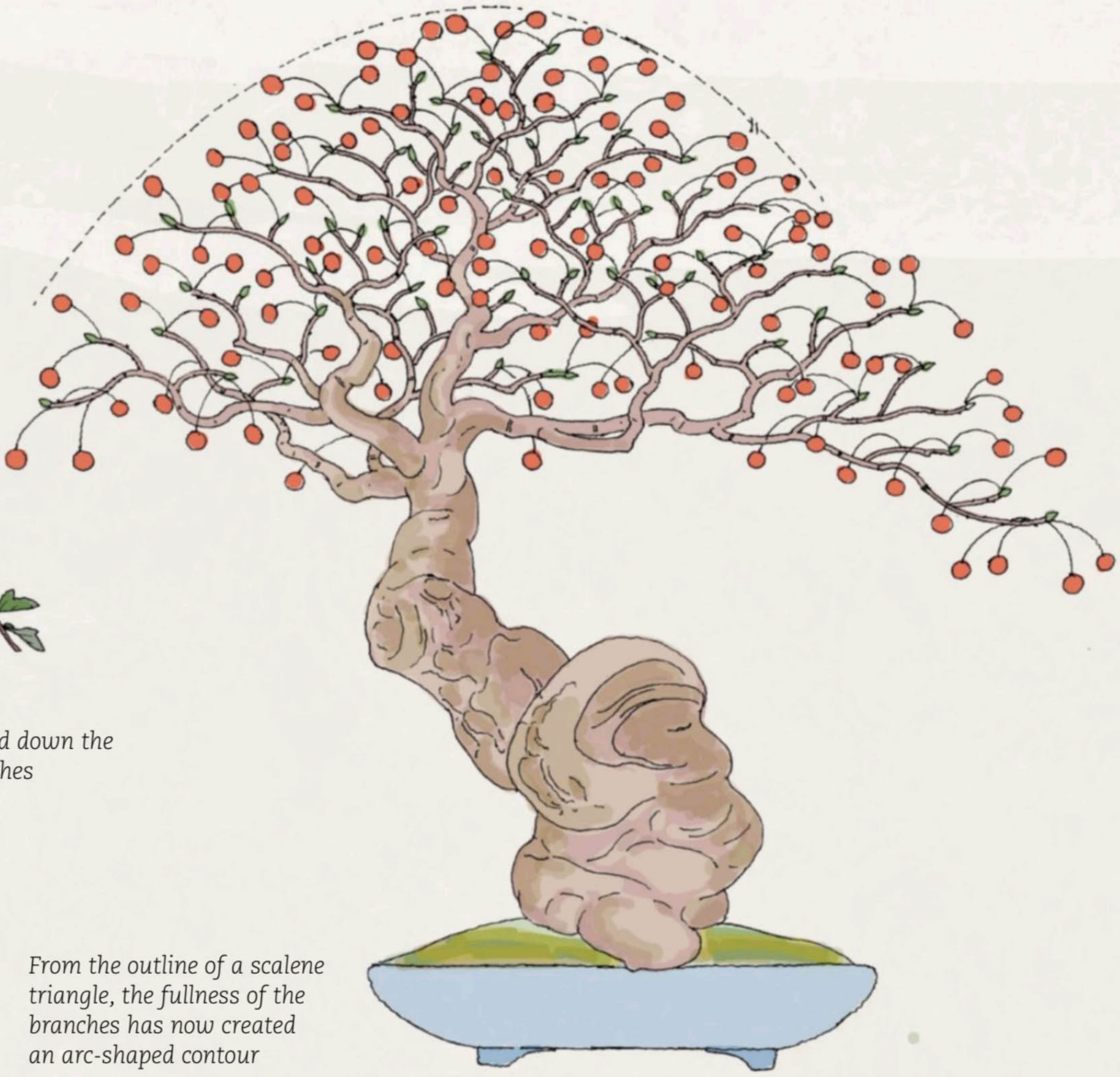
Branch wiring and positioning is done in June and July



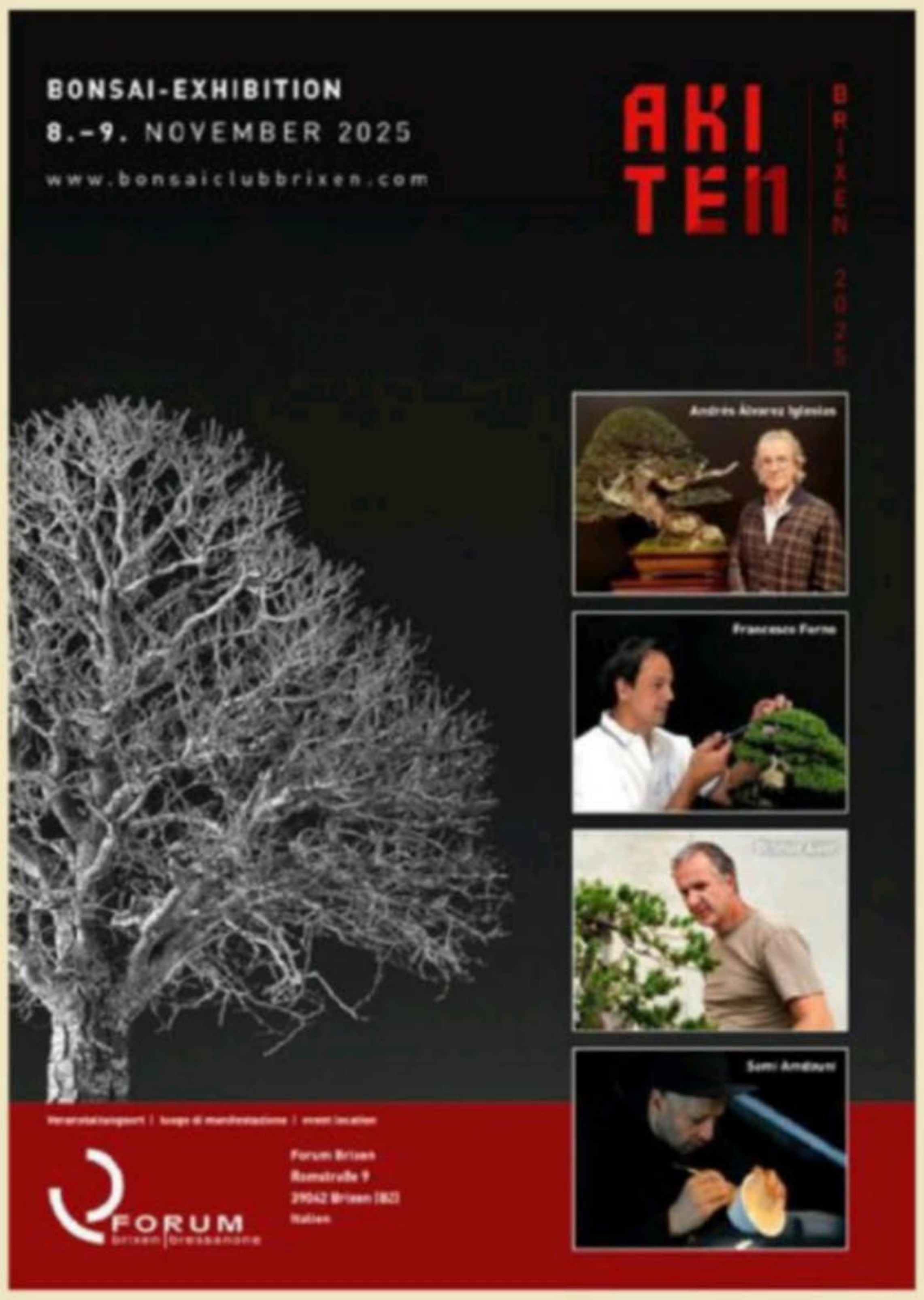
Wire and bend down the upright branches



An arc-shaped contour is slowly created



From the outline of a scalene triangle, the fullness of the branches has now created an arc-shaped contour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In the South Tyrolean Dolomites

Bonsaiclub Brixen hosts the 5th edition of the AKI-TEN in November. Helmut Bachmann, President of Bonsai Club Brixen, looks forward to welcoming you. Guest speaker is Andrés Álvarez Iglesias from Spain, known for having one of the most beautiful bonsai collections in Spain. He is an excellent designer and craftsman. This year shohin will be in the spotlight. Francesco Forno, one of Italy's most successful shohin experts, will lecture on the quality and care of shohin and demonstrate how to create a perfect shohin display.

Included will be the fourth edition of the Ceramic Contest that features a special show of creatively designed bonsai pots. The contesting pots from the previous edition will be exhibited, planted with bonsai.

Sami Amdouni, a ceramic artist from France, introduces you to the ceramic engraving of special shohin bonsai pots. Founding member, Auer Othmar from Brixen, explains the requirements that a pot or ceramic has for a plant.

Another highlight is a special exhibition on 'Tenpai and Kusamono'. Extraordinary sculptures and plants, that were created by humans, nature, the environment — and time.

As well as all this, there is also a selected choice of trade stands, while the Bonsai Party at the Gourmet Hotel Elephant in Brixen has become an absolute must for every connoisseur.

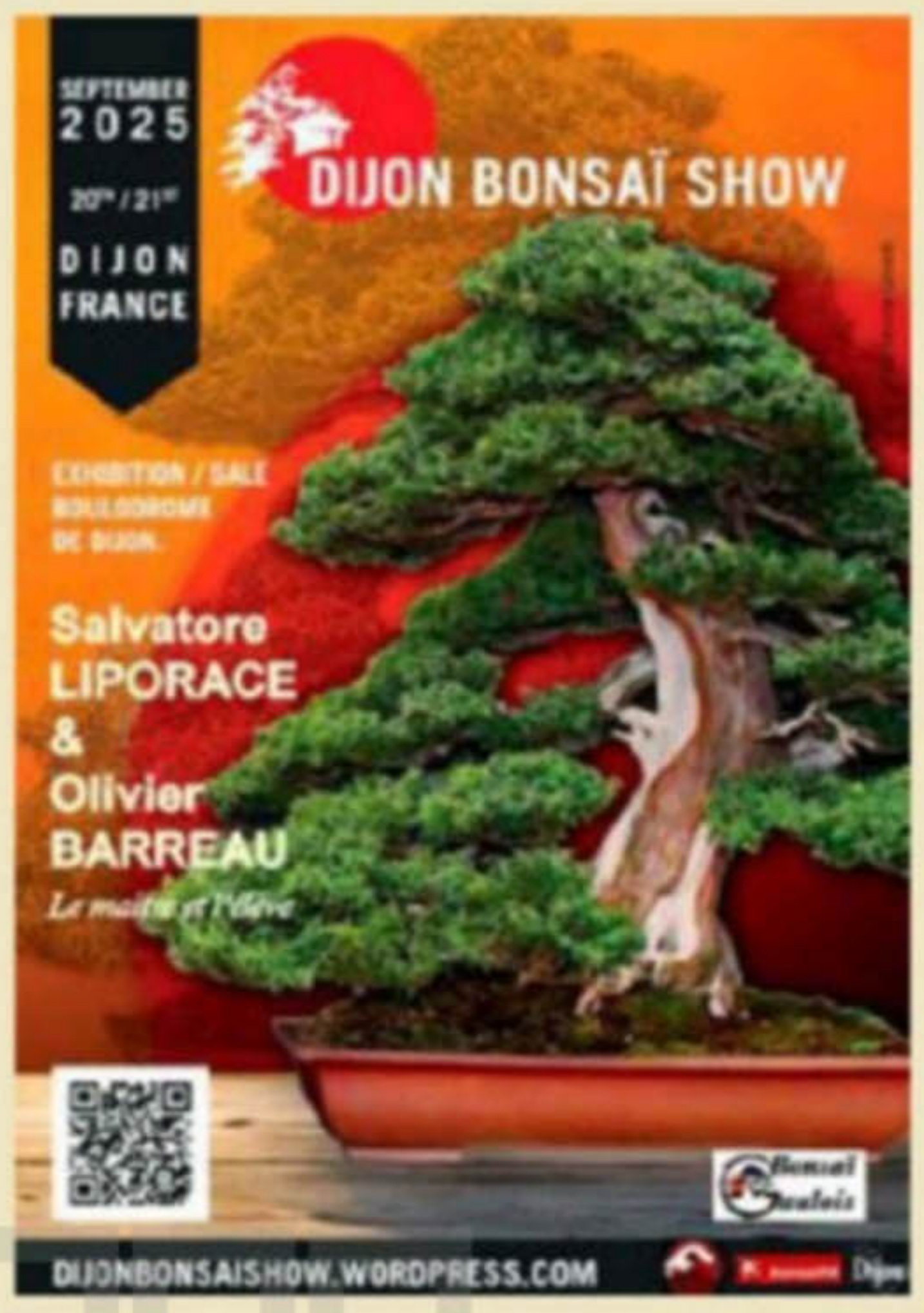
The goal of AKI-TEN is to provide all friends and enthusiasts, both near and far, with an outstanding exhibition and an interesting supporting programme.

When: 8-9 November '25. Where: Forum Brixen, Romstraße 9, 39042 Brixen (BZ), Italy.
Info: info@bonsaiclubbrixen.com

Lego bonsai

A dedicated bonsai lover would most probably be offended, but like it or not, with Lego Botanicals you could say that bonsai really has settled in our western society and has become mainstream. A couple of years ago, Lego introduced the 'Bonsai Tree', variety unspecified, which could be flowering or coniferous. Now there is a Japanese maple bonsai which has a proper bonsai look. Multi-coloured leaves, nebari, curving, tapering trunk, fine branch setting — an improvement for a plastic copy. At Lego there must have been a real bonsai lover who knew what they were doing when designing this bonsai. Maybe future bonsai Masters will say, 'my first bonsai was of Lego'.

LEGO
BOTANICALS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BOULODROME DE DIJON
Salvatore LIPORACE & Olivier BARREAU
Le maître et l'élève
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20 - 21 September Dijon Bonsai Show
Exhibition and Sale stands. Demos by Salvatore Liporace, Olivier Barreau.
***Where:** Boulodrome, 17 Rue Léon Mauris, 21000 Dijon, France.*

***Info:** dijonbonsaishow.wordpress.com*

18-19 October, 2nd Sazankyanpu International Bonsai Exhibition
Interactive demo with Marco Invernizzi, Lecture with Pieter van Uden on maintenance, Alain de Wachter on pre-bonsai, and Stephan Jespers on bonsai pottery.
***Where:** VTC de Mixx, Asbroek 1H in 2230 Herselt, Belgium. **Info:** www.sazankyanpu.be*

18 19
OCTOBER
2025
SAZANKYANPU
2nd OPEN
INTERNATIONAL
BONSAI
EXHIBITION

18-26 October, The 30th Hwa Fong National Show & World Bonsai Friendship Federation
***Where:** Pingtung County, Taiwan.*

21-24 November 45th Taikan-ten
***Where:** Miyako Messe, 9-1 Okazaki Seishoji-cho, Sakyo Ward, Kyoto, 606-8343, Japan.*

8-11 February & 14-18 February 2026 100th Kokufu-ten
One of the most prestigious bonsai exhibitions in the world, will be held in two parts
***Where:** Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum in Ueno Park, Tokyo, Japan.*

28- 31st August 2026, 10th World Bonsai Convention
***Where:** Pavilion Bukit Jalil, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.*
***Info:** www.malaysiabonsaisuiseki.com*

NEXT ISSUE

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197/220
bonsai Focus

Extra sensitive

'It is not always about growing thick trunks for Satsuki,' says Tsurugi Kazuya. 'There is a more sensitive side to this tree, too.'

Drastic measures

Although shohin are small and maybe more brittle, sometimes you need to take a rigorous approach to get the best results. Minoru Kawamura shows you how.

Rocky stuff

Learn how to deal with rock plantings where the rocks have become overgrown by the tree.

Inspiration found in Yosemite

When returning home from a trip to the famous Yosemite Park in the US, Masayuki Fujikawa was totally inspired to make a special creation.

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bonsai focus

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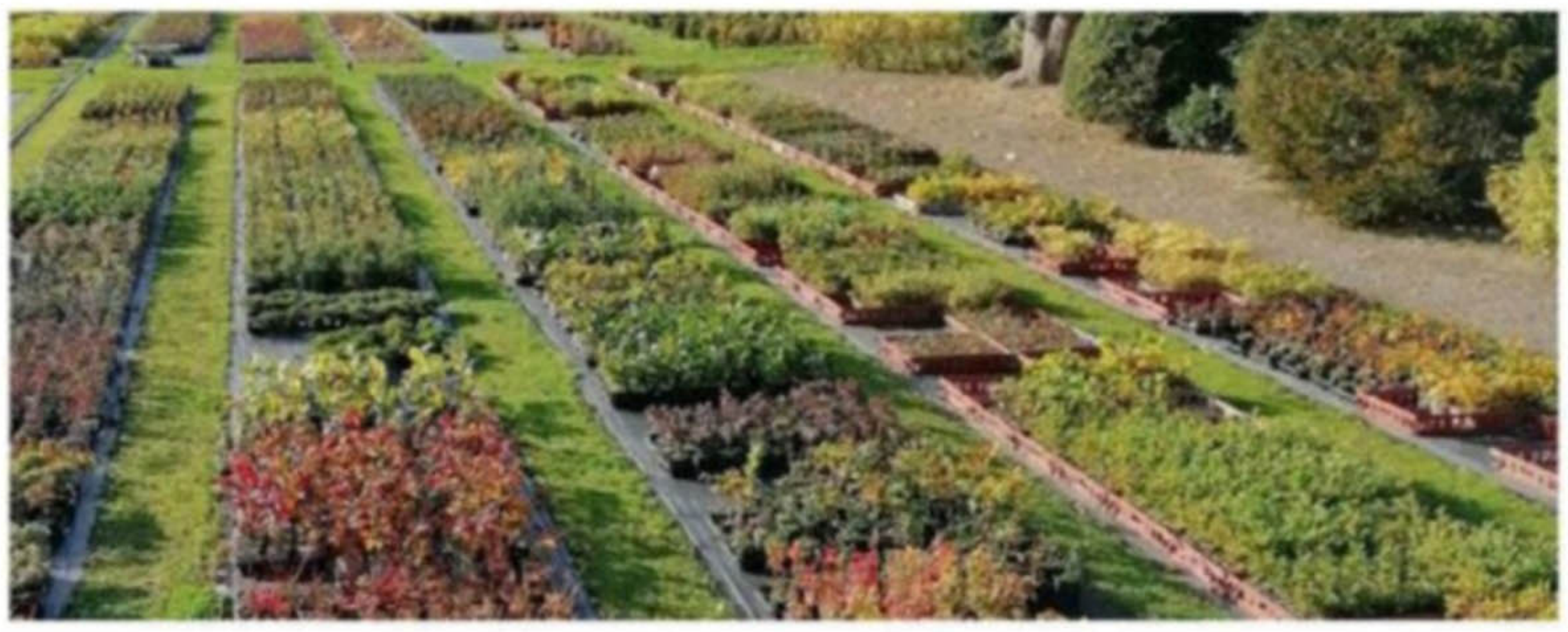

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